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UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

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THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN TO THE PRIESTHOOD: A CRITICAL  
EXAMINATION OF THE DEBATE WITHIN THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION

1961-1986

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis sets out to make a comprehensive study of the debate on the ordination of women to the priesthood in the Anglican Communion. This required, first and foremost, an historical examination of the development of the debate. Chapters 1-3 trace the movement of thought and attitude within the churches which make up the Communion, focusing particularly on the Church of the Province of Southern Africa, the Church of England, and the Episcopal Church of North America. A gradual shift in attitudes is revealed, away from grossly sexist understandings of women's roles in the church, and towards an acceptance that women have both the gifts and the calling for priesthood and indeed, for any role in the church.

The next step after tracing the movement of attitudes in the past, was to examine the attitudes of the present.

Chapter 4 contains the results of empirical research, undertaken in South Africa, on present-day attitudes and arguments in the debate. These, as might be expected, reveal a wide spectrum of opinion, from ultra-conservative stereotypes of women's role to an open acceptance of women occupying any role for which they have the gifts and abilities. Each response, of course, produced theological and scriptural evidence in its own support.

Chapters 5 and 6, therefore, provide a biblical and theological evaluation of the evidence and arguments upon

which these responses were based, both for and against the ordination of women to the priesthood.

The biblical and theological evaluation revealed the crux of the thesis - namely, that the debate on the ordination of women to the priesthood is an integral part of the phenomenon of ecclesial and social sexism. The arguments of the opponents of women's ordination are invariably based on sexist modes of thought. At the same time, however, the arguments of the proponents of women's ordination are, to a large extent, influenced and shaped by those same sexist modes of thought which they are attempting to address. For this reason the arguments in favour of women's ordination are unable to create a new theology in which the full humanity of Christian women as created in the image of God is a non-negotiable assumption; a theology in which therefore the priesthood, and women's participation in it takes on a new form closer to the revelation of the servant priesthood of Christ.

Chapter 7 thus moves beyond the debate on women's ordination to an analysis of the structures and principles of sexism, and especially the manifestations of the sexism in past and present church history. It is only by the complete abolition of sexism in the churches that the true priesthood of both women and men can be achieved.

In Chapter 8 the first tentative steps towards this goal are explored. It is obvious that the abolition of sexism in the churches must primarily take place through the self-liberation of Christian women and men from sexist patterns

of thought and behaviour. Groups such as the Movement for the Ordination of Women in Britain can contribute much towards this end by their outreach to their members who in turn can communicate with fellow parishioners. In this way various groups may be started in the parishes, and house churches may be influenced in their teaching and thinking.

Freedom from sexism demands a re-evaluation of church theology, liturgy and structures. A greater emphasis on house churches as a primary unit of Christian activity and worship is essential to achieve this re-evaluation. House churches could replace rigid hierarchy and liturgy with more egalitarian structures and more participation in the service. Far more theological and scriptural teaching and group study could be achieved in house churches, with the consequent breaking-down of ignorance and prejudice. Such developments, moving the Anglican Church away from its present sexist structures, would be moving it towards its eventual shape as a part of the Kingdom of God.

## INTRODUCTION

The debate on the ordination of women to the priesthood is one of the most crucial issues to face the Anglican Communion. This is because the debate brings into question vast areas of ecclesial theology and liturgy. It is not the single issue it appears to be. Both those who oppose and support it appeal to the Bible, the interpretation of Christian tradition, the nature and roles of men and women in Christian doctrine and history, the understanding of the priesthood, and, not least, the nature of God. In all these areas there exists a wide range of diverse beliefs amongst Anglicans.

Merely to decide to ordain women to the priesthood, then, does not resolve the immense ambivalence of the Anglican Church and related and deeper fundamental theological issues. Furthermore, both the arguments for and the arguments against the ordination of women are, in the last analysis, inconclusive. There is a very clear reason for this. The arguments which oppose the ordination of women to the priesthood are fundamentally sexist. They operate out of a Christian world-view which understands women to be "different" from men, created to fulfil the role of man's "helpmate". Their definitions of women leave the informed reader in no doubt whatsoever that women's "difference" will debar women forever from any position of power and influence in the church, and above all from the sacramental role of priesthood. In other words, the opponents of women priests

are simply articulating the position of the church towards women which has existed throughout Christian history, and which still by and large remains today. Advocates of women's ordination, in their attempt to refute these arguments, are also attempting to refute the traditional sexism of the church itself. Yet they do so using the same sexist structures of theology, liturgy and church government which they ultimately wish to refute. This is clearly problematic and is part of the reason for the apparent stalemate in the debate.

The debate on the ordination of women to the priesthood, therefore, leads inevitably beyond itself for its final resolution. It can be described as a case-history in church sexism. It thus sets a formidable task for those who have a vision of the church in which men and women share equally in all roles, including the vocation to the priesthood. This task starts with a detailed analysis of the sexism of the church, in its structures, its understanding of God, and its world-view. It must be followed by a fresh look at the Scriptures with a view to recreating the church according to a new inclusive understanding of Scripture and tradition. Finally a set of suggestions for new structures, theologies and liturgies must be evolved.

The debate on women priests offers, then, an excellent introduction to the question of sexism in the church. It must, however, be used for this purpose. If the ordination of women is regarded as an end in itself it will, paradoxically, hinder rather than help the cause of the eradication of sexism in the church. The placing of women



as priests in present church structures will merely provide the impression that church sexism has ended whilst in fact little of the fundamental sexism will have been overcome. It is therefore essential to regard the priesting of women as only a step, albeit a very important one, towards liberation from sexism in the church.

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Part I: AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

PART ONE: AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW \*

Chapter 1: Some Tentative Moves: 1841-1960

The ordination of women to the priesthood within the Anglican Communion has become a matter of intense debate and division since the 1960s. However, this contemporary debate has its roots in earlier attempts to provide a meaningful place for women within the structured ministry of the Church of England. By the middle of the 19th century a need was already being expressed for such a place, particularly for women who, having proved themselves on the foreign missionary field, found little opportunity to exercise their gifts within the structures of the church at home. At the same time wide-ranging social change, as well as the challenge of the Oxford Movement, brought pressure to bear upon the Church forcing it in turn, however reluctantly, to make some tentative internal changes. One of these was the formation of the first religious community for women in England since the reformation, established in 1845 under the direction of Dr Edward Pusey.

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\* For an outline of the Historical Development of the Debate from 1845-1985 see Appendix A.

Further progress in including women within the structured life and ministry of the Church of England was made in 1862,<sup>1</sup> when after much debate, the Order of Deaconess was resumed in England, and the Bishop of London ordained the first candidate, Elizabeth Ferrard, to that office. Full recognition of the order within the Anglican Communion as such had to wait, however, until the Lambeth Conference in 1897, and in the intervening years it appears to have made slow progress. In 1898 Deaconess Cecilia Robinson provided the order with theological and historical legitimacy in her classic study entitled The Ministry of Deaconesses.<sup>2</sup> Robinson also documented the chequered history of the order, indicating its origin in the early church and describing how it had gradually been disbanded and forgotten.

In 1908 a Pan-Anglican Congress of church leaders met in London and decided to set up a permanent committee to deal with matters relating to the work of women. It was also to be a means of keeping contact between women working in the home church and those who were working overseas. The committee was entitled the Central Committee (later changed to Council) for Women's Church Work, and consisted of representatives from each home diocese and from the leading church societies. It first met in 1909, and was primarily concerned with the education and training of women workers and with paying them an adequate salary.

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1. Myrtle Langley, Equal Women. A Christian Feminist Perspective, (Basingstoke, Hants: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1983), p.81.
  2. Cecilia Robinson, The Ministry of Deaconesses, (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1898).

The institution of this body indicated clearly that women had begun to gain a foothold in the structures of the church. By this time, however, the struggle for full human rights and dignity for women in the political sphere was well under way. Women were organising themselves to demand equality with men in all areas of life, in particular, in adult suffrage, but without much support from the churches. Indeed, the churches were generally in opposition to women's suffrage, and their role in the anti-suffragette movement did not go unnoticed. In 1893 the American Women's rights activist, Matilda Joselyn Gage, published a book in which she maintained that no single feminist concern was as important as organized religion. In the introduction she stated:

The church has been the major opponent of the suffragists' demand for full personhood. The church provides the ideologist underpinning for womens' inferior status with its teaching that woman was a secondary creation, made for man, to be subordinate to him, and responsible for the downfall of humanity through Eve's original sin.<sup>3</sup>

Gage was one of a number of women at that time who realized that the church's traditional attitude to women was not only degrading to women's dignity and humanity, but was also very successful in excluding women from all spheres of ecclesiastical and political power. The same theological arguments which were and still are used to exclude women from the priesthood, were used to deny women the vote, to bar their entry into the professions, and even to oppose the use of painkillers during childbirth.

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3. Matilda Joselyn Gage, Women, Church and State, (Watertown, Massachusetts: Persephone Press, Reprint Edition, 1980), Original Publication 1893), p.xxviii.

The general discovery amongst women of their right to self-determination and equal respect in the political arena quickly spread to women in the Church of England. B.H. Streeter and E. Picton Tuberville, writing in 1917, were anxious for women to be permitted to participate more fully in the life of the church. They felt that women were still largely excluded from the ministry and decision-making areas of church life, and warned that,

Already, however, there are signs that women who spend a life of service in the attempt to realize great ideals are drifting outside the influence of the church, which practically refuses to ... women any real share in its regular and recognized ministry. If this continues, the loss to the church and to the world will be incalculable.<sup>4</sup>

Picton-Tuberville went further. She remarked sadly,

... the struggle for the recognition of the full liberty of women will be the bitterest and most relentless when women seek a wider service in the Christian church. We are being driven slowly to recognize that the last strongholds of injustice to contend against will be the churches.<sup>5</sup>

Picton-Tuberville concluded that, for women, there is still no room at the inn.

In 1919 a report was published entitled The Ministry of Women, commissioned by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Its work led it to give brief consideration to the question of the exclusion of women from the priesthood. This report established that Christian women had equal status with men, and that this was supported by Jesus' attitude to women. It stated, "Our Lord's teaching gives no support to the prevalent Jewish opinion upon the lower status of women".<sup>6</sup>

4. B.H. Streeter and E. Picton-Tuberville, Women and the Church, (London: T. Fisher Unwin Ltd., 1917), p.viii.

5. Ibid., p.2.

6. The Ministry of Women, Report on the Archbishops Commission, 1919, p.2.

However, the report maintained the traditional view that "... there were functions and responsibilities which at the first our Lord assigned to men and did not assign to women".<sup>7</sup> On the basis of this view it concluded that, although women and men shared a spiritual equality, there was no similar equality as regards religious vocation and public duties. The government of the church and the responsibility of the ministry of the Word and the sacraments was entrusted to men. The report recognized that the Order of Deaconesses had played a part in the development of the early church, and that deaconesses had been recognized as a "class of church officials". It therefore accepted the Order of Deaconesses as being in accord with the teachings of the New Testament. However, its attitude to women and the priesthood was less positive. It stated,

The historic ministry of the Church of Christ has been transmitted through the male sex from the days of the Apostles... It is not our province to discuss these questions. We simply record the fact that the restriction of the ministry of the priesthood to men originated in a generation which was guided by the special gifts of the Holy Spirit.<sup>8</sup>

The evidence of the New Testament was the evidence of that generation. In this, then, one of the first times the question of women priests was even considered in the church of England, it was summarily dismissed.

In 1920 the recognition of the Order of Deaconesses received firm support once again from the Lambeth Conference, which

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7. Ibid., p.2.

8. Ibid., p.2.



urged its restoration throughout the Anglican Communion. Likewise the Lambeth Conference of 1930 affirmed the Order of Deaconesses, stating that,

... The Order of Deaconesses is an order sui generis; the only order of ministry open to women, but an order which both from the solemnity of its ordination and the importance of its functions can satisfy the fullest desires of women to share in the official work of the Church. This may be thought to be a departure from primitive practice, but times have changed, and although we value historical precedents, we do not think that they need entirely restrict us in our endeavour to enlist the great gifts and special contributions of women to the varied and immense needs of the Church today.<sup>9</sup>

The fullest desires of women were not, in fact met, and the question of women's role in the church did not disappear. This may be evidenced by the fact that in London in 1929, another society concerned with women's ministry, the Society for the Ministry of Women in the Church was formed. And in 1935 another report on women, commissioned by the Archbishop, made its appearance. Also entitled The Ministry of Women, its conclusions regarding women priests differed little from those of the previous Report of 1919. It stated,

We are ourselves led to our conclusion by what we believe to be a revelation of God's will for the church as manifested in the New Testament and in the history of the church up to the present time. In the New Testament, while there is evidence for the existence of deaconesses and of women who prophesy, there are no records of the exercise of presbyteral functions by a woman. The continuous tradition of the church has been that of a male priesthood and with this tradition we believe that the general mind of the church is still in accord. It is our conviction that this consensus of tradition and opinion is based upon the will of God, and is, for the Church of today, a sufficient witness to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.<sup>10</sup>

9. Lambeth Report, 1930, p.178.

10. The Ministry of Women, Report on the Archbishops Commission, 1935, p.9.

During the period between the first and second World Wars, the Central Council for Women's Church Work repeatedly pressed for more lay women workers to be trained and employed by the Church. It also expressed its concern over the inequalities in opportunities for service between men and women in the Church of England and pointed out the lack of alternatives for women who wished to serve the church but did not wish to enter into orders.

In 1943 a report commissioned by the Archbishops looked once again at the question of women's work in the church. This report concluded that women were not finding in the Church of England opportunities of work or service comparable with those available to them elsewhere. The Committee remarked that within the church a woman is still "... continually made aware that her sex is a handicap and a limitation".<sup>11</sup> They advocated that in practice as well as in theory, women should be eligible for all offices or duties open to lay men. The Central Council for Women's Church Work thus gained support from this report. However, little appears to have been done to implement its proposals.

At this point, with the question of women's ordination to the priesthood not as yet being seriously and thoroughly considered, a completely unexpected event occurred. In 1944 in Xingxing in Free China, the Right Reverend R.O. Hall, Bishop of South China, ordained Miss Florence Li Tim Oi, then in deacons orders, to the priesthood. He licensed her to work in the Parish of St Mark in Macao, where she had

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11. Women's Work in the Church, Church of England Report, 1943, p.20.

been in charge of an Anglican congregation since 1940. He did this in the conviction that Miss Li had already received the charisma of priesthood, and with firm belief in the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He was also desperately in need of priests. These factors combined led him to take the radical step.

Reaction to Reverend Li's ordination was strong, and at the Lambeth Conference of 1948 her ordination was repudiated. Subsequently, Li was reported to have resumed the status of deaconess, although she insisted that she never resigned her Holy Orders. No formal consideration took place, however, as to whether or not her ordination was a valid one. It seems that then, as now, there was no definitive understanding of what constituted a "valid" ordination.

At the same Lambeth Conference, a request was made by the Anglican Church in China, the Chung Hua Sheng Kung Hui, asking the bishops to consider a proposal to allow the ordination of deaconesses to the priesthood during an experimental period of twenty years. A deaconess so ordained was to remain celibate and to retain her priestly status regardless of the conclusions reached at the end of the twenty-year period. A special committee was appointed to consider this proposal. Its members decided, however, that so radical an experiment could not be made without previous consideration by the Anglican Communion. On these grounds they rejected the proposal.

After this decision, the question of women's ordination to the priesthood lay dormant for some time. However, an effort was made in the Church of England to remove some of

the restrictions imposed on the service of lay women. Since 1938 the Central Council for Women's Church Work had held discussions on the desirability of admitting women to the Office of Lay Reader. From 1949 onwards, attempts were made to have women declared eligible for this post. The Central Readers' Board evaded the issue however and stated that there was no need for assistance in this service. Similarly in 1956 an attempt to gain permission for suitably qualified and licenced lay women workers to read morning and evening prayer and to preach in any service except that of Holy Communion, was defeated in the Convocation of Canterbury.

Thus by 1958 little had been achieved for women who wished to serve the Church of England. The result of this was that women who wished to work with and for others moved even more into alternative areas of activity, such as medicine, education and social work.

This movement of women out of the church was clearly evident at the 1958 Lambeth Conference. The Conference recommended on several occasions that more use be made of trained and qualified women in the church.<sup>12</sup> The Conference also noted with regret that there was sometimes a reluctance to make use of the help which women could give. And it encouraged the clergy to allow the laity, both men and women, more share in the work of the church. However the Conference did not attempt to provide practical means whereby their recommendations could be implemented. It only issued guidelines.

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12. Report of the Lambeth Conference 1958, p.112.

The debate within the Church of England and the Anglican Communion could not continue, however, in ecumenical isolation. Already in the 19th century some Non-conformist and Free Churches had ordained women to the ministry, and as the ecumenical movement gathered momentum between the two World Wars, including initiatives towards church union, so the issue could not be avoided indefinitely or side-stepped by those churches which did not ordain women. Even prior to the formation of the World Council of Churches its General-Secretary-Designate, W.A. Visser 't Hooft commissioned Mrs S. Cavert to conduct a survey of women's views of the church, a survey which included about 50 countries and many different denominations.<sup>13</sup> The material contributed in this survey was considered to be so important that the French Reformed Church asked for the subject of women in the church to be put on the agenda for the World Council of Churches' founding Assembly in Amsterdam in 1948. Here the Study Committee on Women commissioned Dr Kathleen Bliss to work the material into a book, a task which was to take her several years.

At its Central Committee Meeting in Chichester, England, in July 1949, the World Council of Churches set up an official Commission on the Life and Work of Women in the Church. Sarah Chakko of India was appointed chairperson and Kathleen Bliss secretary. The concerns of the Commission fell into three categories. There was concern for the ordinary lay woman and how she could come to feel an important part of the church. There was the question of women who were

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13. Susannah Herzel, A Voice For Women, (Geneva: W.C.C. Publications, 1981), p.7.

professionally employed by the church, in Christian education, women's work, missionary work and executive and administrative positions. And finally there was the issue of the ordination of women.

In 1952 Kathleen Bliss' book was published, entitled The Service and Status of Women in the Churches. It was a well-documented account of work by women of all denominations all over the world, but it poignantly underlined the small share women have in the life and work of the churches.

To say that women's powers to educate and to succour have found an outlet in an immense variety of ways is not the same thing as saying that the Church has made use of even a little of the vast reserve of talent and devotion which lay to hand in the persons of its women members. Often a woman's zeal has been damped down and discouraged by the Church, her gifts of mind and spirit refused, her devotion and labour frittered away in trifles. In 1852 Florence Nightingale wrote to Dean Stanley, an intimate friend, her own inner thoughts about the Church of England ... 'I would have given her my head, my hand, my heart. She would not have them. She told me to go back and do crochet work in my mother's drawing room ... she gave me ... neither work to do for her, nor education for it'.<sup>14</sup>

The Commission on the Life and Work of Women in the Church met in 1952, 1953 and 1954 to discuss theological and sociological problems experienced by women in the churches. In 1954 the Commission recognized a need for a redefinition of its aims and functions. It adopted a new title: The Department on the Cooperation of Men and Women in Church and Society. This departmental status was recognized by the World Council of Churches. The self-understanding of the new department was clearly explained in its proposal:

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14. Kathleen Bliss, The Service and Status of Women in the Churches, (W.C.C. Publications, 1952), pp.13-14.

The aim of the Department shall be to help the churches to work towards such cooperation between men and women as may enable them to make their contribution to the common good of church and society.

The functions of the Department shall be:

1. in the present situation of the churches, to help women to make their full contribution to the total life of the churches and at the same time to encourage the churches to accept the contribution of women to a fuller extent and in more varied ways;
2. to promote among men and women, through the Division of Studies and directly, the study of questions affecting the cooperation and common services of men and women in the churches and in society;
3. to foster an ecumenical outlook in women's organizations in the various churches and countries, to promote cooperation among them and to secure their participation in the ecumenical movement as a whole;
4. to advise and cooperate with the Ecumenical Institute, the Department on the Laity, the Youth Department and any other ecumenical body on the work of the Division of Ecumenical Interpretation.
5. to keep actively in touch with other bodies whose work may have a bearing on the work of the Department.<sup>15</sup>

In 1955 the Department published the Davos Statement, reminding the member churches of the biblical pattern of cooperation. It also encouraged national study commissions, regional conferences, theological study and cooperation with women's Christian organizations and ecumenical groups.

A year later, in 1956, a consultation in Herrenholz, Germany, asked questions, the depth and seriousness of which were unequalled at that time.<sup>16</sup> Reconciliation, cooperation instead of isolation, mutual submission between the sexes, and absolute submission to the Kingdom of God and the

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15. Susannah Herzel, A Voice for Women, (Geneva: W.C.C. Publications, 1981), pp.24-25.

16. Ibid., p.28.

subsequent relativity of all hierarchies and authorities, were all topics under serious discussion. In following consultations the understanding of these concepts was expanded, discussing God's will for men and women in relationships. The equality of all Christians in a partnership of ministry, the task of the clergy to equip the people of God for ministry, and the necessity for Christians to use their special gifts and abilities in cooperation with others for the church - these ideas were far reaching and prophetic for the Church in this century. Fellowship, witness and service-dialogue in Christ and for Christ - were the keynotes of the consultations. At a time when the Anglican Church was doing little for its women members, the World Council of Churches was thus providing enormous stimulus and guidance for its churches. It is strange to observe that so little of this offering was taken up and used.



## Chapter 2: DEBATING IN EARNEST: 1960-1976

We come to 1960, the starting point of our survey. The long, slow and painful development of Anglican understanding concerning women's role in the church now began to accelerate rapidly. One hundred years after the religious life and the Order of Deaconesses were restored to women, the debate moved within the space of fifteen years from a decision to accept women into the governing bodies of the churches to the decisions by some Anglican Provinces to ordain women as full deacons and then to ordain them to the priesthood and episcopate. It is this crucial fifteen years and their aftermath that we are to consider in this chapter.

In 1960 the Provincial Synod of the Church of the Province of South Africa issued a Resolution calling for the appointment of

... A Commission to investigate the theological, ministerial and other considerations involved in the election of women to Provincial Synod, and that the Commission, after possible consultation with other Provinces of the Anglican Communion, prepares if it sees fit, a suitable Bill to be presented to the next session of Provincial Synod.<sup>1</sup>

Thus the first step was taken in the Church of the Province of South Africa towards the recognition of the needs and rights of women in the church, and towards a representation of those needs and rights in the governing body.

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1. Provincial Synod Report of CPSA, 1960, p.38.

A similar move took place in the General Convention of the Episcopal Church of the United States of America in 1961. A joint session of the House of Bishops and Deputies resolved that at a forthcoming joint session,

... the privileges of the floor, with the right to speak, shall be accorded ... to the officers and official representatives of the Triennial Meeting of the Episcopal Churchwomen ....<sup>2</sup>

Thus the organization of North American Anglican women, although a separate body, was to be represented within the governing body of their church.

These steps by the governing bodies of the Church of the Province of South Africa and the Episcopal Church in the United States, significant within their context, were nevertheless far behind the World Council of Churches in the level of concern and awareness of women's issues expressed. Whilst South Africa and the United States were just beginning to allow women some say in the governing of the churches, the World Council of Churches was concerning itself with the ordination of women to the priesthood.

In the New Delhi Assembly Report of 1961, the Commission on Faith and Order requested the Working Committee "... to establish a study of the theological, biblical, and ecclesiological issues involved in the ordination of women".<sup>3</sup> The World Council of Churches was thus preparing

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2. Journal of the General Convention of ECUSA, September 18th 1961.  
 3. The New Delhi Report, 1961, p.171.

itself for a momentous debate, helped particularly by the Department of Co-operation of Men and Women in Church, Family and Society. This department had been concerned with the question of the ordination of women since its inception in 1949. Its concern, however, as we have seen, had moved beyond the confines of this issue to the need for open and mutual co-operation between the sexes. In New Delhi it urged in its report that the principle of cooperation be accepted both with regard to structural changes and spiritual life. The report observed that a number of member churches permitted the ordination of women, and suggested that in both those churches that permitted this and those that did not, a greater number of professionally-trained women be employed in the churches and be invited to participate in policy-making decisions.

A new concern for women's ministry in the Church of England appeared in the Summer Session of the General Synod of 1962. The Annual Report of the Council for Women's Ministry referred to the fact that CACTM (Central Advisory Council for the Ministry) was preparing a special report on the subject of how women could best be recognized, recruited, trained and deployed in the organized work of the church. The church, it was stated, needed women in its service. Young girls were increasingly expressing a desire to serve the church and asking how to do this. At that time their options were either to become a nun, a deaconess or a lay worker. But some were expressing a vocation for holy orders.

The Autumn session of 1962 continued this debate in discussing the Report drawn up by the Central Advisory Council for the Ministry, entitled Gender and Ministry. In drawing up this report, the Council had been required to examine the recruitment and use of women for full-time service in the Church of England, and to advise the bishops and the Assembly. The report suggested that the whole relationship of the sexes in modern society had changed so tremendously that this was bound to be reflected in the consideration of the place of women in the life and service of the Church. A particular ministry and service of women in the church had always been recognised, but the "... ministry of women in the total ministry of the church was still used only sparingly and often grudgingly".<sup>4</sup>

The report, stated however, that it had deliberately avoided, "... the more particular, and in many ways more limited, issue of the ordination of women to the priesthood".<sup>5</sup> The reason for this, as stated, was the divisiveness of this issue in church life, and in ecumenical relations. However, the report recommended that the reasons for withholding the ordained priesthood from women, "... should be thoroughly examined by a competent group or commission of theologians".<sup>6</sup>

The real concern of the report was "... to get the Church as a whole to recognize how little use they were making of the various ways of ministry for women in the Church".<sup>7</sup> Women

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4. Church of England General Synod Report, 1961, p.682.

5. Ibid., p.682.

6. Ibid., p.682.

7. Ibid., p.682.

serving the church spent all their lives in the position of a young curate. Women who give their lives to the full-time service of the church should receive a proper degree of responsibility, status and security. Money should be set aside to establish posts of responsibility in the dioceses for pastoral, teaching and other specialized work for women. The use of women as Readers should be considered. After debate a motion was put, and carried, to the effect that the Archbishop would be asked to appoint a Committee to make a thorough examination of the various reasons for the withholding of the ordained and representative priesthood from women.

The report Gender and Ministry was a landmark in the debate on women's place in the church and the ordination of women. Many of the questions it asked are still very relevant for us today. Among these the following stand out:

In what sense is the priest's calling to 'be Christ' different from the lay Christian's calling - particularly when this calling is accepted with the intention that it is for life? - e.g. that of a doctor or a married person? ... Many devout people are ... baffled by the fact that the Church gives the recognition of Holy Orders to only one ministry, out of the many to which Christians as the Body of Christ are called ... it is fundamental ... that there is a priesthood of the laity.<sup>8</sup>

Gender and Ministry raised questions about the meaning and status of the Office of Deaconesses, which was an ordained office yet not in holy orders. It criticized the inadequate salaries of women workers of the church. And it maintained that "... the most costly burden that women workers have had

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8. CACTM Report Gender and Ministry, pp.11-17.

to carry has been the grudging attitude of the church itself, both clergy and laity, towards their ministry".<sup>9</sup> All this, argued the report, derived from an inadequate theology of the laity. The report advocated a shared ministry of clergy and laity, and it called for an examination of the question of the ordination of women to the priesthood. All in all, it was a wide-ranging document, dealing with issues to which adequate answers were and are vital to the church's future.

The 1963 Spring Session of the General Synod of the Church of England witnessed the beginnings of a reponse to the Gender and Ministry report. The annual report of the Council for Women's Ministry stated that several of the suggestions of the 1962 CACTM report were being implemented. New scales of pay for women workers were being considered and there had been improvements in the status of deaconesses and women workers, who would now automatically be members of parochial church councils. Women workers were being invited to more staff meetings. They were also taking their place in the procession in church and had their own pews close to those of the ministers. And discussions were taking place on the possibility of admitting women to the Office of Reader.

In 1964 the Episcopal Church of the United States of America held its General Convention. This proved a disappointing event for the issue of women's ordination. A resolution from the Committee on Amendments to the Constitution

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9. Ibid., p.17.

suggesting that the word "layman" be replaced with "layperson" was defeated. A resolution in the Joint Session called for amendments to governing practice including

... that the Council submit to the Women of the Church its programme for the triennium; the seating of the Women of the Church in the Joint Session of the General Convention; and finally, the approval of the Women of the Church before any money covered by the budget could be expended....<sup>10</sup>

This resolution was also defeated. Furthermore, the House of Deputies defeated a resolution to allow the seating of women Deputies in that house. In response to this, the Presiding Bishop, the Right Reverend John Elbridge Hines made a statement criticizing the action: "When I heard yesterday of the action of the House of Deputies about the women of our Church I was greatly disturbed. It is not my own personal feelings that are involved here, but my deepest conviction".<sup>11</sup> He expressed deep sorrow at "... the unwillingness to face the fact that the women are members of the Body of Christ, that they are of the laity and members of the Body of Christ".<sup>12</sup>

A more hopeful action in this convention was the adoption of Canon 51, which abolished a previous diaconal condition that deaconesses be unmarried or widowed, automatically losing their job if they were to marry. However, it was also made clear that deaconesses still had no satisfactory standard for salaries, no adequate medical insurance and no adequate pension plan.

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10. Journal of the General Convention of ECUSA, October 22 1964.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

In opposition to this negative stance of the church, the Triennial Meeting of the Women of the Church passed a resolution at their meeting calling for full participation of lay persons in the life of the Church, and requesting that "attention be directed to the eligibility of every lay person for elections to vestries, diocesan governing bodies, and General Convention".<sup>13</sup>

1964 was also the year in which the World Council of Churches study Concerning the Ordination of Women, commissioned in 1961, was published. It was a joint effort on the part of the Department of Faith and Order and the Department on Cooperation of Men and Women in Church, Family and Society. This was a helpful document, raising important questions and evaluating the arguments against women's ordination in open and constructive ways. It maintained that the question of whether women could undertake the responsibilities of a pastor was a peripheral one. The question of fundamental importance was, "does the life of the church adequately reflect the great truth that in Christ there is neither male nor female?"<sup>14</sup> It pointed out that different churches worked from different assumptions, some churches believing that it was clear from the New Testament and tradition that the ministries of their church should be restricted to men, and other churches interpreting scripture and tradition more openly and open-endedly. These churches were convinced that the form of church order could be

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13. Ibid.

14. Concerning the Ordination of Women, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1964), p.1.



modified in a new age and situation with guidance from the Holy Spirit. Neither side in the dispute should adopt a negative stance toward the other. "... it is of great importance that the churches should not isolate themselves from one another in their attitudes".<sup>15</sup>

The document emphasized many times the deep theological implications of the debate. It stressed that a wide understanding of the ministry of the church, of hermeneutics, and of anthropology were needed. It was quite incorrect to view the issue as resulting from feminist agitation; it had been caused by social, cultural, economic and political factors. The document pointed out that although it would be wrong to accommodate Christian truth to secular movements, it must also be acknowledged that God may use secular movements to indicate his will to Christians. It is partly in this way that Christians had rediscovered the essential New Testament message that men and women are created in the image of God and are of equal worth and dignity. Christians had also rediscovered the scriptural tenet that all the members of the Body have their own unique gifts and ministries. Both these truths had been partially overlaid for many centuries, and both had to be clearly expressed in the churches of the present.

There was a great deal of theological reflection in this document. The exegetical, dogmatic and ecclesiastical aspects of the ordination of women to the priesthood were carefully discussed. The writers concluded that biblical

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15. Ibid., p.2.

teaching could not be abstracted from its context. The problem of today's world could not be answered by quoting single passages. There was no developed New Testament doctrine on the relationship between men and women. Every question with which the early church was confronted was answered by referring to the central revelation of Christ. "Right exegesis does not consist of imposing biblical formularies on a given situation but of interpreting it in harmony with ... the intention of the New Testament".<sup>16</sup> The eschatological character of the Christian message gave people new freedom from all kinds of domination, including the domination of their sexual nature. Furthermore, the persons of the Trinity were beyond the confines of sex,

Therefore, as the ministry is the announcement to the world of the trinitarian reality and work, we must renounce the argument in favour of the masculinity of ecclesial ministry on the basis of the fact that God is called Father or that Jesus Christ is incarnated as male ... This argument ... distorts the parabolic and symbolic language in which trinitarian formulas describe the divine mystery ... it obscures the soteriological purpose of the ministry ....<sup>17</sup>

The document criticized the separation of the sacramental from the non-sacramental ministry in present-day churches. It called for a re-examination by churches of the value and content of ecclesiastical tradition. Sounding a warning note, it urged that,

In this re-examination of their traditions and canon law, the churches should be aware both of the valid historical reasons for the shape of their own tradition and of the non-theological influences (such as outdated patterns of sexual prejudice) which have entered all traditions.<sup>18</sup>

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16. Ibid., p.7.

17. Ibid., p.7.

18. Ibid., p.9.

The document concluded that it is the duty of the churches to seek new forms of ministry to respond to new situations in the world today. Finally, in order to represent a diversity of views it added two papers on the scriptural evidence and three personal articles from representatives of various traditions. Altogether this publication provides a major source of material for any church anxious to conduct an honest and open study of the issue.

The following year in our survey, 1965, was for the most part an uneventful one, the only occurrence being in the Church of the Province of South Africa where the Anglican Women's Fellowship was formed and welcomed by the Provincial Synod. However, 1966 proved considerably more interesting. In the General Synod of the Church of England a startling observation was made with reference to women Readers. It was pointed out that 31 years had elapsed since the Archbishops' Commission had recommended that suitable women should be eligible for this task, yet no decisions had been taken as to their training. This appears to be an intriguing example of the dilatoriness of church government, and possibly, of delaying tactics!

However, 1966 was also the year in which the Church of England's Report of the Archbishops' Commission entitled Women and Holy Orders was produced. This report had interesting overlaps with the World Council of Churches' publication Concerning the Ordination of Women and, like that work, it referred to the modern emancipation of women

and to new insights into the equality of women and men awakened by the spirit of the times. It reflected the failure of the church to provide an adequate ministry for women. It also maintained that the quotation of scriptural texts cannot settle the issue, especially when their context is not considered. In addition, the report considered the psychological factors relevant to the dispute. It argued that,

There is no psychological quality which is peculiar to one sex ... there are no mental aptitudes or personality characteristics which are confined to men, nor are there any biological or psychological qualities of the female sex which preclude a woman from performing the duties of an ordained minister.<sup>19</sup>

The report was very outspoken about the problem of prejudice in a debate of this sort. It argued,

Theological statements about the nature of man and woman ... often involve assumptions about the desirability of particular sexual roles and need to be considered in the light of genetic and sociological evidence. The Church and its ministry exist, and have always existed, in changing societies, ... When the possibility of an important change touches upon powerful, and often unconscious, anxieties and wishes, rational reflection is likely to be seriously affected by emotional bias. Such bias, which not infrequently amounts to inflexible prejudice is evident in some conflicts arising from the suggestion that women should be ordained ....<sup>20</sup>

The report noted further that resistance of this nature to women ministers was most prevalent in those who held a "high" doctrine of the church, the ministry and the sacraments.

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19. Church of England Report, Women and Holy Orders, 1966, p.18.

20. Ibid., p.19.

In its second section the report cited the arguments for and against the ordination of women to the priesthood. The opposition case advanced the arguments that such a step is contrary to church tradition; that the revolutionary nature of the Christian religion would have been extended to include women priests had this been the intention of its founder and of the apostles; that a female priesthood belonged to nature religions and would distort the character of Christian ministry; and that the maleness of the priesthood was an essential feature of its representative character. The arguments for women's ordination included the stance that the differences between men and women did not render women incapable of ordination; that the assumptions of the inferiority of women based on Pauline teachings were no longer tenable; that arguments based on the metaphoric representation of God as Father of Jesus Christ as male could not be decisive in excluding women from the priesthood; that many women truly experienced a calling from God; that women would bring special gifts to the enrichment of the priesthood; and that the priesthood could never be fully representative of the Body of Christ until both men and women took their place equally within it. The report concluded with an essay on a new understanding of lay ministry. Altogether it was an excellent survey of the debate.

The 1967 Spring Assembly of the Church of England saw this report debated. The chairperson of the Commission responsible for the report, the Bishop of Chester, briefly outlined the major statements in the report. He stated that

"The Commission does not consider that the propriety of ordaining women to the priesthood can be assessed one way by any clear directive from the New Testament".<sup>21</sup> He also spoke of the need to understand the nature of sexuality, and of the need to examine the role that social conditioning and prejudice plays in the formation of a decision on the issue of women's ordination. He mentioned the ecumenical aspects of the question. And finally, he spoke with great concern of the representative and symbolic function of a priest. He warned that, as "men and women symbolize different things, to change and modify so dynamic a symbol as the priesthood would have a profound, subtle and unpredictable effect upon the character of the church itself".<sup>22</sup> This area of symbolism, he felt, had been little explored. And the bishop closed with a plea to make more use of women's ministry with or without the ordained priesthood. Other speakers also stressed the need to expand women's ministry outside the ordained priesthood.

The report was criticized for considering the issue of women's ordination to the priesthood in isolation from the nature of the Ministry as a whole; it was felt that the meaning of ordination and the relation of ordained and lay to the total ministry was an essential context of the debate. The report was also criticized for insufficient attention paid to the need of the sacraments felt by many isolated communities which are ministered to by women only, and visited by priests only once or twice a year. The belief was expressed that the ministry of women outside the

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21. Church of England General Synod Report , 1967, p.192.

22. Ibid., p.196.

ordained priesthood cannot be fully developed whilst women are barred from the priesthood. The discrimination made on the grounds of sex alone inevitably entails a tendency to view the female as somehow inferior.

At the close of the debate the Reverend Professor C.W.H. Lampe moved that the matter should be further considered, and indicated that the consideration should not be too long delayed. Referring to an essay included in the report, he remarked "... the essay entitled 'Why the Christian Priesthood is Male' shows us how desperate are the shifts and twists to which people can be reduced in the quest for a-priori theological objections".<sup>23</sup> He was similarly caustic with regard to the use of 1 Corinthians 11:

... in this particular passage St Paul is hard pressed to find a-priori theological objections to something he does not like, namely, women not wearing their veils in church. When he has ploughed his way through some obscure theological argument, in the end he is reduced to saying 'We have no such custom' ... But I do not classify among theological arguments the assumption that is sometimes made that catholic tradition is in itself inherently unalterable.<sup>24</sup>

The debate was then adjourned until the next session.

The 1967 Summer Session continued the debate. This highlighted many of the major arguments for and against the ordination of women to the priesthood. On the positive side, the Reverend Professor D.E. Nineham maintained that qualities peculiar to the female sex have in no way proved to be incompatible with the exercise of holy orders. He also stated that if women are believed to be incapable of

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23. Ibid., p.215.

24. Ibid., p.215.

assuming holy orders, "... then at any rate in respect of this matter of the duties and privileges of priesthood it must be true that women are second-class citizens of the kingdom."<sup>25</sup> This Professor Nineham believed to be contrary to Galatians 3:28, which he understood to mean that "as a result of what Christ has done in the Christian community, there is no essential inequality of status between men and women".<sup>26</sup> Nineham added that a problem with those who use the argument of tradition against the ordination of women is that they do not take history really seriously. They do not fully grasp the changes in relations between the sexes which have taken place, and they do not understand the vital importance of reassessing God's will in changing times.

Striking a psychological note, Mrs P.V. Lloyd referred to the prejudices and fears which the question of women's ordination aroused, especially on the part of the clergy. She said that there were many priests who felt threatened by women parish workers who would feel similarly threatened by women priests.

Various other comments give an idea of the range and scope of the debate. The Reverend H. Riley argued that, as Jesus challenged so many assumptions of contemporary opinion, one surely cannot assume that he did not give a ministerial commission to women merely out of deference to public opinion. Even the women at the tomb were not asked to carry the message to the world, but simply to the disciples. He also referred to the teachings of Paul. In response to

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25. Ibid., p.280.

26. Ibid., p.280.



this, Mrs J.M. Mayland remarked that Paul, who was so far ahead of other thinkers of his time would be the first to expect us to have progressed a little in two thousand years.

Mrs B.E. Howarth stated that the crux of the matter was what we understood by the priestly function. This she defined as the continuing activity of the Body of Christ, a corporate activity which was both male and female - sex was irrelevant. The Reverend J.W. Wenham argued that New Testament teaching was meant for all time. It was a matter not merely of social custom but of divine order that Christ was the head of the Church and man was the head of the women. Miss P.M.C. Evans believed that with the ordination of women would come more team ministries, in which women priests would take their place. Part-time ministries would also be a valuable innovation and suitable to some women priests.

The debate then closed and a motion moved by Professor Lampe was put:

That this Assembly, believing that there are no conclusive theological reasons why women should not be ordained to the priesthood but recognizing that it would not be wise to take unilateral action at this time, would welcome further consideration of this matter both by the Working Party set up by the Anglican Council for the Church's Ministry and the Council for Womens Ministry in the Church and the Joint Committee of Representatives of the Church of England and the Methodist Church and in consultation with any other Churches which may be willing to enter into dialogue with the Church of England.<sup>27</sup>

The motion was lost in the House of Clergy.

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27. Ibid., p.291.

Miss V.E. Pitt then moved:

That this Assembly having weighed the arguments set down in the report, judges that individual women who feel called to exercise the office and work of a priest in the Church shall now be considered, on the same basis as individual men, as candidates for Holy Orders.<sup>28</sup>

Miss Pitt pointed out the grave responsibility of the Church in denying that women are able to receive a call from God to the ordained priesthood. The history in which the faith was rooted - and which was upheld by opponents of women's ordination - was not necessarily theological. The conventions which had applied and to some extent still did apply in western culture were not necessarily the will of God. The argument that headship was exclusively the man's was strange in a church of which the head was a woman; was the Queen in a state of sin through exercising the headship? The church must no longer ignore its responsibility to test women's vocations. The motion was put to the vote and lost in all three houses.

The debate was being vigorously pursued on the other side of the Atlantic as well. Following the 1964 defeat of the motion to seat women deputies, the Triennial Meeting of the Women in the Church issued a statement on the subject to the 1967 General Convention. In it they made some fundamental points: the terms "layman" and "laymen" in Article 1, Section 4 of the Constitution of the General Convention had been construed to signify only males. Previous General Conventions had thus always refused to seat women deputies. However, women participated fully as communicant members in

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28. Ibid., p.291.

the life of the Episcopal Church. And women were able to be fully involved in all other spheres of life. Moreover, the church's mission needed all the talents of all its members, regardless of sex. In recognition of this, most dioceses, missionary districts and provinces had recently given women the right to membership in their respective assemblies. The Joint Commission on the Structure of the General Convention and Provinces had recommended the seating of women as deputies. In previous debates on this issue members of the House of Deputies had stated that women were not in favour of such a change. Therefore, the 32nd Triennial Meeting of the Women of the Church endorsed the recommendation of the Joint Commission and requested the General Convention to take favourable action. Partly in response to this statement, the 1967 Convention amended Section 4, Article 1 of the Constitution to read 'layperson' instead of "layman".

Both houses then, after debate, approved the appointment of women deputies. This was a deeply significant step. However it is interesting to note that it took from 1934, when Episcopal women first asked for their right to be seated as deputies, until 1967 for this right to be acknowledged. Later, the House of Bishops also moved the following resolution:

That the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America establish a special Joint Commission to make a thorough theological study of the role of women in the church, with particular regard to the question of admission of women to the ordained ministry.<sup>29</sup>

The resolution was adopted.

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29. Journal of the General Convention of ECUSA, 1967.

The 1968 Lambeth Conference took place at this stage in the debate. During Lambeth the issues and findings of the debate within the Anglican Communion thus far were clearly expressed. Resolution 34 affirmed the view expressed during the Conference that the theological arguments presented for and against the ordination of women to the priesthood were inconclusive. All churches and provinces within the Communion were called to study the issue and to report their findings to the Anglican Consultative Council.

The ACC was also requested to initiate consultations with churches which do and do not ordain women to the priesthood and to make the results of these consultations available. And in Resolution 38, Lambeth encouraged the churches to make provision for women to share in the conduct of the liturgy, to preach, to baptize, to read the epistle and gospel, and to help in the distribution of the elements. In addition to these resolutions, the Conference Report also provided a pithy summing-up of its debate. It reaffirmed that it found no conclusive theological arguments for the exclusion of women from the priesthood. Whilst fully acknowledging the authority of scripture and tradition in the Anglican Communion, it pointed out that neither gave an unequivocal answer to this question. The evidence of scripture appeared to be divided on the issue, verses demanding female subordination being balanced by verses bearing the message of Gal 3:28. Likewise tradition could not provide a satisfactory answer. The traditional belief that women could not receive Holy Orders reflected biological assumptions about the natural inferiority of

women which were no longer tenable. But if these beliefs were now rejected, it was argued, "... The appeal to tradition is virtually reduced to the observation that there happens to be no precedent for ordaining women to be priests. The New Testament does not encourage Christians to think that nothing should be done for the first time".<sup>30</sup> The report also referred to the fact that God's image as Father was not our only image of God, nor did it indicate that God was male. Other, equally powerful images of God existed and some of these were feminine images.

Despite the hostility many felt towards the concept of women priests, the report argued that women had all the personal capacities looked for in priesthood. There had been women priests in other churches for a number of years with no ill effects; in fact their gifts and talents had been welcomed and valued. The report stressed that the cultural factors which contributed to the opposition to the ordination of women should be offset by the church taking steps to educate its members to think constructively about the issues. This remark illustrated the concern expressed during the conference that the laity should become more involved in the decision-making processes of the church. The ministry of the laity, too, was an area in which it was felt the church should expand.

Finally, the report expressed the conviction of the conference that the Order of Deaconesses, the status of which had for so long been uncertain, should be accepted as

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30. 1968 Lambeth Conference Report, p.106.

within the Order of Deacons and fully within Holy Orders. This last step was particularly significant. For those in favour of ordaining women it was seen as a clear recognition of women's ability and right to receive holy orders, whilst for those against women's ordination it was seen as the "thin end of the wedge", making subsequent ordination to the priesthood more feasible and thus more likely.

This same suggestion, that women should be clearly included within the diaconate and thus within the three-fold ordained ministry, was strongly advocated by the Church of England report Women in Ministry: A Study, published in 1968. This report was produced by a working party set up jointly by the Advisory Council for the Church's Ministry and the Council for Women's Ministry in the Church. The working party was not asked to consider the question of the ordination of women to the priesthood, although it frequently encountered the issue during its work. But its findings were nevertheless important, for they described the difficulties and degradation encountered by women workers in the church, and emphasized the resulting loss to the church of the energies and talents of its women members. Among the problems of women church workers it mentioned were stereotyping - women were almost invariably expected to run the children's groups, for example; inadequate job security - women could be asked to leave because the incumbent changed, or money was short, or the parish wanted a curate; low job status - a senior woman worker could be regarded as junior to the newest curate; low salaries and pension funds; and little share in decision-making and church government.

These difficulties were the cause of real hardship and hurt. The report quoted a woman who was asked to leave in order to make way for a curate, as saying, "undoubtedly we are needed, but not always wanted".<sup>31</sup> In the face of these problems, in the belief that the church greatly needed women workers, the report called for the ordination of women to the diaconate. It argued that the church needed a true diaconate, not just a training period for future priests. And it maintained that in women workers the church already had such a diaconate. All that was needed was for the church to reinstitute a permanent diaconate, open equally to men and women, and thus to recognize its women workers as deacons within holy orders.

The World Council of Churches Assembly at Uppsala and the Church of the Province of South Africa's Provincial Synod also took place in 1968. Both groups raised the question of women's ministry in the church and encouraged studies in this area. The WCC, however, went on to specify that the studies for which it called should focus on the admission of women to the priesthood. This was in contrast to the CPSA, which had not yet reached that stage in its deliberations.

In 1969 the Church of England debated the report Women in Ministry. The Bishop of Portsmouth pointed out that the report was seriously hampered due to the confusion in the church on the issues of the ordination of women and the status and function of deaconesses. Moreover, the Order of Deacon itself was unspecified, and obviously a deaconess

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31. Women in Ministry: A Study, Church of England Report 1968, p.33.

could not be in the same order as deacon if one could be ordained to the priesthood and the other could not. The problems of the low status and pay of women church workers were also discussed. It was stated that women workers were being exploited by the church, and their work refused full recognition. However arrangements were being made to readjust wage scales. The problems of status and recognition were more difficult to solve.

A report on the ministry of women, commissioned for the CPSA by the Archbishop of Cape Town, made its appearance in 1970. Its task was to consider how women may share in the church's ministry and contribute to its mission. The Commission was of the opinion that positive steps had to be taken to widen the opportunities for women who wish to serve their church. It was concerned about the attitude it perceived in the church that "... there are two separate roles in the Church, one for men and one for women ...".<sup>32</sup> It perceived,

... prejudice against widening the scope of women's service ... this is often due to the lack of a reasoned approach to the possibility of making use of the varied gifts and abilities of women ... In the present age, social conditions being as they are, young people are not prepared to accept the segregation of the sexes in Church, and comparatively few young women join Church organizations ....<sup>33</sup>

Turning to the question of the priesthood, the Commission stated its belief that the Holy Spirit was leading the church towards the acceptance of women into the priesthood. Affirming the 1968 Lambeth Resolution 34, which stated that

32. The Ministry of Women, report commissioned by the Archbishop of Cape Town. 1970, p.5.

33. Ibid., p.5.



there were no conclusive theological arguments for or against the ordination of women, it recommended that a detailed study be done on the issue. It singled out various salient features needing special consideration: the nature and authority of priesthood, women's role in the new and developing patterns of ministry such as team ministries; and psychological differences between men and women.

The Commission also carefully considered the developing position of African women in South Africa. These women were achieving higher educational, professional and financial status. "African women are being accepted as partners and assumption of new duties and responsibilities should now be reflected in their position in the Church".<sup>34</sup> This stance had been articulated earlier, at the Consultation on the Responsibility of Christian Women in Africa held at Makerere University in 1964. Here the recommendation had been that "... the All Africa Council of Churches should give immediate and serious consideration to the ordination of women to the full ministry of the Church".<sup>35</sup>

The Archbishop of Cape Town's Commission also considered the diaconate, recommending that it should be broadened to include women and men, both full-time and part-time; that all these deacons should be in Holy Orders; and that they should perform pastoral and liturgical duties except those which the priest alone can perform. Such a diaconate would conform closely to the office of deacon described in the Acts of the Apostles. It would also help meet the need for

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34. Ibid., pp.7-8.

35. Ibid., p.8.

ministry in many parts of the country, especially in the rural areas. This diaconate would be an order with functions of its own, not simply a preparation for the priesthood. It would promote the service of women in the ministry of the church better than would an Order of Deaconesses. Therefore the commission recommended that the office and title of Deaconess should not be introduced into South Africa. It did, however, encourage the service of women in lay ministry. This ministry, however, had low status and income and little had been done to improve these conditions. This situation should be altered, giving women church workers full recognition of their work, including them in clergy meetings and decision-making, and providing them with adequate salaries and medical and pension benefits. This report was received by the 1970 CPSA Provincial Synod, and sent out to the dioceses for study and comment.

Meanwhile, the 1970 ECUSA General Convention took place, and an important decision was made. The report of the Joint Commission on Women Church Workers moved a resolution, "That those made Deaconesses by a laying on of hands with appropriate prayers be declared to be within the Diaconate".<sup>36</sup> Suitable legislation for those who had already been ordained as deaconesses was also advocated. The resolution was passed both in the House of Bishops and in the House of Deputies: thus at last deaconesses were formally recognized as part of the diaconate and thus in Holy Orders. This was a deeply meaningful event to those

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36. Journal of the General Convention of ECUSA 1970.

women who felt called to serve God in a clerical vocation. However it was to be the only encouragement of the convention.

The Committee on Theological Education moved the following resolution in the House of Deputies,

Resolved, the House of Bishops concurring, That, subject to the resolution of any constitutional and canonical questions, the 63rd General Convention of the Church affirms that women are eligible to seek and accept ordering to the diaconate and to the priesthood and to be ordained and consecrated to the episcopate.<sup>37</sup>

The resolution was debated at great length, but in the end a vote by orders and dioceses was taken, and the resolution was lost. A move to reconsider the question was also lost. In the House of Bishops, the Bishop of Chicago moved a resolution to inform the Anglican Consultative Council, meeting in Limuru in 1971, that the House of Bishops endorsed the principle of the ordination of women to the priesthood and the ordination and consecration of women to the episcopate. This resolution was placed upon the calendar, and a special meeting called to discuss it. This discussion was then again postponed, and placed upon the agenda of the interim meeting of the house in 1971. At this meeting, the matter was referred to a special committee, to be reported upon at the following interim meeting in 1972.

In 1971 the WCC Department on Cooperation of Men and Women in Church, Family and Society published a report of their 1970 consultation on the Ordination of Women. This

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37. Ibid., 1970.

consisted of several papers on different aspects of the issue, case studies from women theologians and ordained women, and group discussions and findings. The consultation received its mandate from the Uppsala Assembly in 1968, and was thoroughly ecumenical in constitution and contents.<sup>38</sup>

The consultation observed a growing movement within the churches to take the ministries of women with greater seriousness. It noted that at that time seventy-two of the member churches of the WCC ordained women. No church which had decided to ordain women had ever had cause to reconsider that decision. Instead an enrichment and greater adequacy of ministry had been experienced. This observation was of great importance, since many churches which did not ordain women expressed forebodings which were merely theoretical possibilities. If tested, these would, on the experience of churches which did ordain women, probably be proved groundless. However even in churches which already ordained women, discriminatory problems were still experienced by some of the women concerned. Even after ordination women still had few opportunities for leadership or involvement in decision-making.

An African contribution argued that it was not African traditions but Western traditions which created a stumbling-block to the priesting of women: "In view of the place that African traditional life gives women especially in religion one often wonders if the apathy ... towards the priesthood of women is not more an influence from their mother churches

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38. The Ordination of Women, (WCC Publication, 1971), p.3.

than from African religion and African way of life".<sup>39</sup> Other African contributors also believed that the low status of women in their churches could be ascribed to imported Western assumptions about women's place. These speakers told of the status enjoyed by women of some groups: "In certain African tribes women have always had great influence. Among the Lovedu of the Transvaal the Rain Queen ruled. The Ashanti and the Swazi are amongst those tribes where women were traditionally dominant. Many societies were matrilineal or matriarchal ... In some societies they (women) were consulted, as diviners or prophetesses, not unlike the Old Testament prophetess Deborah, and others."<sup>40</sup> However, it was also pointed out that many tribal structures were patriarchal and polygamy was practised. Such societies sometimes had taboos such as the taboo upon menstruating, preventing "unclean" women from participating in sacrificial offerings. Yet even in these societies, women enjoyed considerable respect and status.

In parts of Africa women were assuming positions of leadership in religious movements. This, it was stated, was often a reassertion of traditional prophetic roles which had previously come into conflict with Western Christianity. A number of indigenous churches had been started by women, such as Legio Maria in Kenya, Mai Chaza in Umtali, and the Lumpa Church in Zambia. Women in many indigenous churches of the Zionist type were eligible for ordination and administered the sacraments. Mainline churches in rural areas were often run by women. One woman delegate remarked:

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39. Ibid., p.3.

40. Ibid., pp.5-6.

"We do all the work the men do not like. We raise the money, we visit the sick, we cater for special functions, providing the tea, the food. We do not shout; we just keep quiet. Men like to feel superior; we let them feel so".<sup>41</sup>

Having studied many different instances of religious leadership by African women, Brigalia Bam expressed the view that the question of the inferiority of women in African thought and life was much exaggerated. In practically all African societies women could be religious leaders with ritual and sacred duties. They might rank equal with or higher in importance than their male counterparts. Bam concluded that both women and men religious leaders in Africa, once recognized as having sacred authority, were accepted without question.

The consultation next turned its attention to the ministries of women in a number of other cultures, and examined the state and progress of the debate on the ordination of women in the various churches. There was a great deal of consensus that the arguments against the ordination of women were inadequate and increasingly unconvincing, whilst the weight of argument in favour of women priests was growing. As more and more churches ordained women the fear of ecumenical problems was being seen as groundless. There was an increasing need for renewal in the churches, and the desire for unbroken continuity with the past was seen as less important than previously had been the case. Role stereotyping of the sexes was gradually being contradicted and invalidated, whilst the oneness of man and woman as the

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41. Ibid., p.9.

image of God was affirmed and seen to be necessary for the wholeness and health of the Body. This growth throughout the churches of acceptance of women's ministry and the ordination of women to the priesthood was the most striking element in this consultation.

In 1971 the Anglican Consultative Council met in Limuru. One of its tasks was to respond to the Bishop of Hong Kong who had asked for advice on ordination since his diocesan synod had approved in principle the ordination of women to the priesthood. In reply to this request, the Council passed Resolution 28b, carried by 24 votes to 22: "In reply to the request of the Council of the Church of South-East Asia, this Council advises the Bishop of Hong Kong, acting with the approval of his synod, and any other bishop of the Anglican Communion acting with the approval of his province, that if he decides to ordain women to the priesthood, his action will be acceptable to this Council; and that this Council will use its good offices to encourage all provinces of the Anglican Communion to continue in communion with these dioceses".<sup>42</sup>

The Limuru meeting of the Consultative Council opened the way for the first women to be ordained since the ordination in 1944 of Li Tim Oi. The synod of the Diocese of Hong Kong had voted a year previously in favour of ordaining women to the priesthood, but action had been postponed until the Anglican Consultative Council meeting at Limuru had taken place. As a result of the Limuru decision, the Bishop of

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42. "Ordination of Women", by Christian Howard, (Ecumenical Review, July 1977), p.3.

Hong Kong decided to proceed with the ordination of two women. On Advent Sunday 1971, Bishop Baker ordained to the priesthood Jane Hwang and Joyce Bennett. In his address to the Diocesan Synod in November 1971, he gave his reasons.

If humanity is to be fully represented before God in the priesthood it is logical to suppose that the ministry which is not limited to people of one tribe or race should not be limited to one sex ... Christ himself raised the whole status of women by the way in which he talked with them naturally and on equal terms ... My hope is that Hong Kong will present to the Church some living experience of women in the priesthood ... Someone has to make a start ....<sup>43</sup>

It was thus in Hong Kong, after years of consultation and hesitation, that the first generally recognized ordinations of women to the Anglican priesthood took place. For the first time, the Anglican Communion included women priests amongst its clergy.

The debate within the other churches of the Anglican Communion, was however, still far from over. The Limuru resolution caused the Standing Committee of the Church of England General Synod to ask the Advisory Council and the Council for Women's Ministry in the church for advice on the question of the ordination of women to the priesthood. As a result, Ms Christian Howard was invited to produce a survey of the current state of opinion on the ordination of women. She produced an excellent document in 1972, including a brief historical preface to the question, the biblical evidence involved, the question of tradition, the main arguments for and against such a move, practical and social

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43. Christian Howard, The Ordination of Women to the Priesthood, (London: C10 Publishing, GS104, 1972), p.56.



considerations, the situation of each church in the Communion regarding the issue, and a survey of women's views on their ordination. The document was meticulous in its attention to detail, balanced and objective. It concluded from its study of the question that "... the Church as a living and growing organism developed its 'ministries' in response to the particular demands of the ever-changing patterns of social evolution. In short, there is no divinely appointed, unchanging 'church order' valid for all ages and places".<sup>44</sup>

This report was debated at the 1972 Autumn session of the Church of England General Synod. The Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich moved "that the Synod take note of this report". He praised the report, and pointed out the urgency of making a decision on the issue. The diocese of Hong Kong had ordained two women priests, and the question then arose as to whether it was still in full communion with other members of the Anglican Communion as its priests were now not all automatically interchangeable with those of other dioceses. He commended Ms Howard's statement that the reasons for the ordination of women to the priesthood must be theological. At the same time it had to be remembered that the New Testament was not the end of God's revelation to us. Christians must always be open to the possibility of new discoveries.

Reverend O.W.H. Clark expressed the ambivalent feelings of many delegates when he spoke of the arguments for and

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44. Ibid., p.29.

against women's ordination which he felt to be invalid. Although some women felt themselves to be truly called to the sacred ministry, this was, "... not in itself an argument for the possibility or desirability of making any change".<sup>45</sup> On the other side he argued that the practical difficulties involved in women's ordination were likewise irrelevant to the debate. He also challenged the argument against the ordination of women which he described as, "... that which derives from a fundamentalistic attitude to certain injunctions to local churches here and there in the New Testament." This argument, he declared "develops in time into the wholly unacceptable Calvinistic notion of subjection and dominance".<sup>46</sup>

A staunch advocate of women's ordination, Professor G.W.H. Lampe, stated that as the question was wholly a theological one, it must be clearly distinguished from the women's movement in society. He went on to raise the question of the separation of the ministry of the Word and the ministry of the Sacraments. Women were permitted to exercise the first, but not the second. Yet tradition had always held the two together. If women were to exercise the one, why was the sex difference used to drive a wedge between the two in women's ministry. Furthermore both men and women were baptized into the priesthood of all believers. However men alone were permitted to receive a call to the specialized exercise of that same basic priesthood.

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45. Church of England General Synod Report, 1971, p.688.

46. Ibid., p.689.

Mrs J.M. Mayland, arguing against a strict and literal interpretation of biblical texts concerning women, pointed out that the content of the Christian revelation is Christ himself, not a book, and that Christ is a person, alive and with us today, guiding the church in history. After some further debate, the motion was put and carried.

Shortly after this in the United States the scheduled Special Meeting of the ECUSA House of Bishops to discuss the ordination of women occurred. The Special Committee appointed the previous year made its report. The report contained a lengthy account of the main biblical and theological evidence which needed consideration before a conclusion could be reached. The evidence included: the ministry; scripture and tradition; evangelism; and the practicalities of the question.<sup>47</sup>

The discussion of the ministry started with an affirmation of women as deacons, and went on to an explication of the priesthood. The priesthood expressed both the High Priesthood of Christ and also the Royal Priesthood into which all Christians entered in baptism. Through ordination, priests were called by God and authorized by the Body to speak and act for the church and the world in making offering for them through Jesus to the Father. Priesthood was not derived from the church; it came from God, and was recognized and ratified by the church. The Christian minister did not hold a separate and individual priesthood. Christ was the one Priest, and Christian priests were called

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47. Special Meeting of the House of Bishops, ECUSA General Convention Report, 1972.

to be representatives of him and to him. It is here that the question is asked whether this representation required maleness as a necessary attribute.

The discussion of scripture and tradition in the report represented the position against, and the position for, the ordination of women. The position against women's ordination maintained that according to the New Testament men exercised the ministry of bishop-presbyter. Jesus did not choose a woman to be one of the Twelve. It was clearly taught that woman was subordinate to man in leadership. Moreover men, not women, symbolized the initial creative act of Christ, and maleness was required for this task. This had been the teaching of the church during its entire existence. With such evidence against women's ordination, ECUSA should not undertake so revolutionary and misguided a step.

Those holding the position for women's ordination thought differently. Genesis 1:26b made it clear that both female and male were to rule over creation. The reasons why Genesis 2 became the only account to be referred to and given authority by Paul and others of that time were sociological and cultural. But Christian understanding of women and of the priesthood should not borrow from the old priesthood of Israel. Christian priesthood had to be an expression of the totally new ministry of the risen Christ. The question under discussion asked, was God now calling women to the priesthood? Surely Christ's priesthood "... is too comprehensive to be contained by the symbolism of one

sex, that in fact its variety and depth call for full sacramental feminine expression in order to represent a God who sustains both masculinity and femininity?"<sup>48</sup> It was the message and mission of Christ through the church which was crucial here. An organization which was seen to be devaluing women into second-class citizens was alienating many people and thus denying them access to the good news of Jesus Christ.

The findings of this report were presented to the Special Meeting. The ensuing debate revealed that the House of Bishops was still deeply divided on the issue. Some felt that there were no real biblical or theological objections; some felt very strongly that there were indeed such objections; and some called for more exegetical and theological study. The opinion was stated that the ordination to the priesthood progressed naturally from the ordination to the diaconate. However there was considerable uncertainty expressed as to the definition both of the diaconate and of the priesthood. Some bishops felt that women had special gifts and qualities to bring to the priesthood, yet acknowledged that there would be serious strains for such women, both in the priesthood and in the family situation. The view was expressed that the membership of the church needed more education and involvement in the issue. And would such a move benefit evangelism?

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48. Special Meeting of the House of Bishops, ECUSA General Convention Report, 1972, p.1124.

Many bishops expressed concern over the possibility of unilateral action, whilst others affirmed the leadership of such action as being valuable to other churches. The seriousness of the breach with tradition was a source of disquiet for some, yet others felt that no further delay on the issue could be tolerated. The fear of schism was a very real one, and similarly the ecumenical problems of such a move, especially with the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, was a major issue. Yet this could be a call from God, and such a call must be unhesitatingly obeyed.

After considerable debate a resolution to pass a motion introduced by the Bishop of Chicago in 1970 was called. A roll-call vote was requested and granted. There were 74 bishops in favour; 61 against; and five abstentions. The resolution was therefore adopted:

Whereas, The Special Meeting of the House of Bishops, on October the 23rd, 1970, at Houston, referred for consideration by the House at this meeting the following statement: "It is the mind of this House that it endorses the principle of the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood and the Ordination and Consecration of Women to the Episcopate; therefore be it

- 1 Resolved, That this present House adopt this statement as to the mind of the House; and be it further
- 2 Resolved, That the Committee on Constitution and the Committee on Canons be instructed to prepare the necessary constitutional and canonical changes to put this Resolution into effect for presentation at the General Convention of 1973.<sup>49</sup>

The following year the 64th General Convention took place. A motion in the House of Deputies, resolving that the

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49. Report of the ECUSA General Convention 1973, p.1114.

convention provide for the ordination of women, as well as men, to the priesthood and episcopate, was defeated. Interestingly enough, in both the 1970 and 1973 conventions there were more "yes" than "no" votes in the House of Deputies, but there were sufficient divided delegations to defeat the issue. (Controversial motions such as this one are voted upon by means of a vote by orders, in which clergy and laity vote separately by delegation: If a delegation's vote is divided it in effect becomes a "no" vote.) A second motion, calling for serious consideration of the nature of the priesthood and episcopate, and the Christian theology of human sexuality; and calling for further ecumenical dialogue on these issues with other churches in the Anglican Communion and with the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches, was likewise defeated.

Considerable concern was expressed in the House of Deputies that some bishops had expressed an intention to proceed to ordain women without the agreement of the deputies. A letter of collegiality and loyalty was then issued by the House of Bishops reaffirming their commitment to the church's constitutional and canonical process. However in the House of Bishops' meeting, a number of bishops issued a statement to be entered into the record, expressing their strong belief in the ordination of women, and their determination not to let the issue rest until women were eligible for ordination:

As has so frequently happened in the history of civilization, human societies have developed rules and traditions to enshrine the rights and responsibilities of a ruling or dominant segment of each age. In so doing, such rights have denied

equal access to other segments of that time. Finally and inevitably the sense of justice prevails, and it becomes essential to see that all human rights are available to all human beings.

We ... have already expressed our position on the theological right and moral justice of opening ordination to the Priesthood and the Episcopate in the Episcopal Church to all adult human persons who felt God's call to this vocation and have been examined by appropriate Church officials. We wish to underscore this conviction at this time ...

We respect the rights of those who differ with us on this question to make their conviction known, but we ask, as leaders bearing responsibility in the Episcopal church, to have our view equally stated and respected ...

We should not be true to the guidance of the Holy Spirit through our own consciences if we did not now speak. So we affix our names as evidence of this conviction in favour of the ordination of women, in profound trust in divine guidance, to let this church know that this issue of moral justice and theological justification must not rest until all have known equal treatment in their search for vocation.<sup>50</sup>

A resolution was then moved in the House of Bishops, proposing that an ad hoc committee be appointed to study and set forth an objective definition of the doctrine of priesthood as held by the Episcopal Church. The committee would also be asked to provide a definitive statement of contemporary Christian sexuality, with special consideration being given to the relationship and inter-dependence of the sexes within the church. The resolution was adopted. These events illustrated the major division between bishops and deputies on the issue, and the strong feelings on each side. After only a few years of serious debate on the issue, tensions were running high.

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50. Ibid., p.1115.



The next Church of England General Synod took place in 1973.

The Archbishop of York recorded a motion that

this Synod resolves that before any final answer is given on behalf of the Church of England to the questions of the Anglican Consultative Council about the ordination of women to the priesthood, the opinion of the dioceses be obtained as to (a) whether they accept the principle, and (b) whether they consider consequent action to be desirable at the present time?<sup>51</sup>

The Archbishop briefly recapitulated the events in the debate in the Church of England, starting in 1962 with the resolution which appointed a committee to make a thorough investigation of the various reasons for withholding the ordained priesthood from women. From this beginning the debate had progressed until the Limuru resolution had resulted in the ordination of two women in Hong Kong. The Limuru conference had also posed the question that the synod had before it.

The Archbishop requested the Assembly to keep its mind open to the issue and not to harbour prejudices. He also requested that scriptural texts not be taken in isolation but that an effort be made to appreciate the movement of history and thus to differentiate the transient from the permanent truths of the scriptures. Another, even more fundamental question, was that of the basic qualification for ordination. Was it, asked the Archbishop, masculinity; or was it redeemed humanity? Finally, the Archbishop raised the question of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, particularly in relation to tradition and the ministry. He asked the Assembly if the patterns of ministry were fixed

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51. Church of England General Synod Report 1973, p.534.

and inviolable at the time of the New Testament or if they had developed since that time. And he asked if the metaphors of the Spirit, those of wind and fire, lead Christians to expect a static, rigid and unchanging Church, or a dynamic, diverse and changing Church? In illustration of this point he mentioned the issue of birth-control. In the early debates on this issue it was strongly condemned. But since then the attitude had changed to one of acceptance. The Archbishop asked: "In the broadest sphere of the liberation of women from the restrictions and inhibitions of a bygone age, who can fail to detect the work of the Spirit?"<sup>52</sup> By voting for the motion under debate the Church of England was not being rushed into a decision, but it was ensuring that the matter was being taken seriously.

The Reverend G.B. Austin, a strong opponent of women priests, spoke against the motion, requesting that the principle of the ordination of women to the priesthood first be approved by the General Synod before the question be submitted to the dioceses. He believed that the Holy Spirit might well be guiding the Church to a different sort of ministry, but not to the ordination of women. After some debate, the motion was put and carried.

Another church to debate the ordination of women in 1973 was the CPSA. Here the work of the Commission on the Role of Women in the Church was commended by Synod and urged to continue. This was in view of the fact that, although the majority opinion of the Commission was that the Holy Spirit

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52. Ibid., p.535.

was leading the church to the admission of women to the priesthood, the minority opinion was that the evidence was still inconclusive and thus further consideration was needed. The Synod resolved, therefore, that the Commission should pursue its investigations under new membership. The resolution gave the new commission wide-ranging instructions:

That the new Commission

(a) Should take into consideration the majority opinion expressed by members of the Commission ... and make specific recommendations to Episcopal Synod and Provincial Standing Committee at their meeting in November 1974 concerning the steps to be taken for the training, ordaining and placing of women, should it be decided at the next Provincial Synod that women be admitted to the priesthood.

(b) Should attempt to resolve the inconclusiveness of available evidence which made it impossible for a minority of the Commission to make any positive recommendation at this stage.

(c) Should urge upon the whole of the Church of the Province the necessity of seeking the will of God in this matter through faithful prayer, and should devise means of bringing this necessity to the attention of all Dioceses and parishes.<sup>53</sup>

The new Commission was also asked to explore the patterns of ministry developing in the universal church and the place of women in these patterns.

The Synod also resolved to have a working group appointed to make proposals implementing the recommendations of the report of the Commission on the Ministry of Women. It asked all dioceses to take steps to ensure that the ministry and status of full-time paid workers be recognized and facilitated, and that salaries and benefits of these workers

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53. CPSA Provincial Synod 1973, p.47.

"be placed on a realistic and non-discriminatory basis".<sup>54</sup> The Synod asked further that the Provincial Standing Committee consider how best to organize and co-ordinate training for men and women in all categories of service. And it requested all dioceses to plan for the greater involvement of lay people, both men and women, in various forms of parish and diocesan work. Such people were to be given adequate training and supervision, and should be accredited as workers in the service of the church.

The Synod passed one further resolution of significance in this sitting. It resolved "That this Synod be aware of and take whatever action is possible into the whole question of the Laws that deprive women of their rights and that make women to be perpetual minors".<sup>55</sup> This resolution indicates clearly the growing awareness of sexist discrimination against women in society as a whole, and a willingness to condemn and act against such discrimination.

A report by the second Anglican Consultative Council meeting in 1973 indicated the number of churches concerned about the ordination of women. The Church of England, the Church in Wales, the Church of the Province of New Zealand, the CPSA and the Episcopal Church of the United States had all prepared reports for the Council. The Church of England in Australia and the Anglican Church of Canada had both carried out studies on the issue. And the question had been widely debated. Ordination of women had been approved in principle by the Church of the Province of Burma, the Church of the

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54. Ibid., p.48.

55. Ibid., p.48.

Province of New Zealand and the Anglican Church of Canada. Reports commissioned on the issue had been referred to the dioceses for study in the Church of England, the Church of Wales and the Church of England in Australia. In the United States the House of Bishops had voted in favour of women's ordination. And in the diocese of Hong Kong two women priests were already serving their church. The Anglican Consultative Council reaffirmed the right of each member church of the Communion to make its own decision with regard to the priesting of women. These decisions would receive full acceptance within the Communion.<sup>56</sup>

1974 proved to be one of the most momentous years in the development of the debate. On Monday, July 29th, in Philadelphia, United States of America, eleven women deacons were ordained to the priesthood of the Episcopal Church of the United States. Bishops Corrigan, De Witt, Ramos and Welles presided at the ceremony. Shortly before the ceremony Bishop De Witt read an open letter on behalf of his colleagues to the House of Bishops:

On Monday, July 23, 1974, The Feast of Saints Mary and Martha, God willing, we intend to ordain to the sacred priesthood some several women deacons. We want to make known as clearly and as wide as we can the reflections on Christian obedience which have led us to this action.

We are painfully conscious of the diversity of thinking in our Church on this issue, and have been deeply sobered by that fact. We are acutely aware that this issue involves theological considerations, that it involves biblical considerations, that it involves considerations of Church tradition, and that it raises the vexing question of amicable consensus in our household of faith.

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56. Anglican Consultative Council Report, 1973, p.41.

We are convinced that all these factors have been given due consideration by the Church at large, and by us. We note that the House of Bishops is on record as being in favour of the ordination of women. We note that a majority of the clergy and laity in the House of Deputies is also on record as being in favour, even though an inequitable rule of procedure in that house has frustrated the will of the majority.

All of the foregoing factors, by themselves, would not necessarily dictate the action we intend. Nor, even would this intended action necessarily be required by the painful fact that we know pastorally the injustice, the hurt, the offense to women which is occasioned by the present position of our Church on this issue.

However, there is a ruling factor which does require this action on our part. It is our obedience to the Lordship of Christ, our response to the sovereignty of His Spirit for the Church.

One of the chief marks of the Church is its being the community of the Resurrection. Ours is a risen Lord. He was raised in the power of the Spirit so that we might participate, however inadequately, in His triumph against sin and separation, proclaim the goodness of His victory, and occasionally ourselves walk in newness of life. His Spirit is the Lord of the Church. Hearing His command, we can heed no other. We gladly join ourselves with those who in other times and places, as well as here and now, have sought obedience to that same Spirit.

This action is therefore intended as an act of obedience to the Spirit ... We pray this action may be, as we intend it, a proclamation of the Gospel - God has acted for us, and expects us in obedience, to respond with appropriate action.<sup>57</sup>

Two weeks after the ordination service the House of Bishops held a special meeting. At this meeting Bishop De Witt spoke of the service and the preparation for it. For many months there had been contact between a growing group of bishops, priests, deacons and laypersons all across the country who felt compelled by conscience to press for women to be ordained in such a service. The need for regularity

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57. ECUSA Special Meeting of the House of Bishops 1974, pp.B182-B183.

in such an ordination was known, but the need for immediate action was felt to be overpowering. Yet even during the afternoon and evening before the service the bishops and women ordinands spent hours discussing whether they should proceed in what they felt to be right. They were led to believe unanimously that they should proceed. During the service an answer to the various objections to women's ordination was made. Bishop De Witt repeated this answer to the assembly meeting of bishops.

The conflict between both revelation in the Scriptures and the doctrine of the Church, on the one hand, and the discipline, rules, and regulations and common practices of the Protestant Episcopal Church on the other hand, have long been both observed and experienced.

There is nothing new in being compelled to choose the truth revealed in Scripture and expressed in doctrine when this truth is in conflict with our rules and ways.

This is such a time. Neither the Word nor the great expositions of that Word forbid what we propose. Indeed, that which both declare about women in creation and in the new creation command our present action. The time for our obedience is now.<sup>58</sup>

Bishop Ramos then addressed the House. He stressed his love for and allegiance to the church, and above all, his primary love for and allegiance to the Gospel of Christ. He had taken this step out of love for God and for the church, which he deeply felt "... must not make of sex a new circumcision for our church's witness and mission to our present world".<sup>59</sup> St Paul, the bishop argued, had overridden the old laws to include the Gentiles in the Church. In the recent past the Episcopal Church had

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58. Ibid., p.B184.

59. Ibid., p.B196.

disobeyed the law of the land to abolish skin colour as a new circumcision. Bishop Ramos demanded that the distinction of sex, like the distinction of colour, did not become a new circumcision for believers.

On the following day the Bishop of New York, Bishop Paul Moore, Jn., presented a statement by the diocesan Bishops of the women ordinands. The statement requested that the House reaffirm its support of the principle that women were eligible for ordination to the priesthood and episcopate, and that the House urge the acceptance of this principle by the next meeting of the General Convention. The Bishops' statement also requested that the next General Convention should decide whether or not the ordination of the women deacons was invalid. However, Bishop Murray moved a resolution, "That the House of Bishops declare that priestly orders were not conferred on the eleven deacons at the service in Philadelphia on July 29, 1974".<sup>60</sup>

During the ensuing discussion a resolution was passed to refer Bishop Murray's resolution to the Special Committee on Resolutions for consideration. The Bishop of Utah then moved a further resolution,

That this House of Bishops, having heard from Bishops Corrigan, De Witt, Welles and Ramos the reasons for their action, express our disagreement with them and their rationale.

We believe they are wrong; we decry their acting in deliberate disobedience to the order of the Church and the violation of the collegiality of the House of Bishops as well as the legislative process of the whole Church.

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60. Ibid., B194.



Be it further,

Resolved, That we recommend to the Dioceses in which the ordinands are canonically resident that they be inhibited from exercising the functions of priesthood until such time as the General Convention of the Church authorizes the ordination of women to the Priesthood and Episcopate; and be it further

Resolved, That this House of Bishops commit itself to the principle of full and equal access to all Orders of the Church's Ministry, regardless of sex; and be it further

Resolved, That this House of Bishops call the Church to enact the necessary legislation to allow the ordination of women to all Orders of Ministry at the next General Convention.<sup>61</sup>

The Resolutions Committee revised the resolution of the Bishop of Utah, and put the result to a roll-call vote:

Resolved, That the House of Bishops, having heard from Bishops Corrigan, De Witt, Welles, and Ramos the reasons for their action, express our understanding of their feelings for the action, express our disagreement with their decision and action. We believe they are wrong; we decry their acting in violation of the collegiality of the House of Bishops, as well as the legislative process of the whole Church.

Further, we express our conviction that the necessary conditions for valid ordination to the priesthood in the Episcopal Church were not fulfilled on the occasion in question; since we are convinced that a Bishop's authority to ordain can be effectively exercised only in and for a community which has authorized him to act for them, and as a member of the episcopal college; and since there was a failure to act in fulfillment of constitutional and canonical requirements for ordination. And be it further

Resolved, That we believe it is urgent that the General Convention reconsider at the Minneapolis meeting the question of the ordination of women to priesthood, and be it further

Resolved, That this House call upon all concerned to wait upon and abide by whatever action the General Convention decides upon in this regard.<sup>62</sup>

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61. Ibid., p.B195.

62. Ibid., p.B198.

The resolution was passed. This resolution, unlike the preceding one moved by the Bishop of Utah, states clearly that the necessary conditions for valid ordinations were not fulfilled in the Philadelphia ordinations, and that those women were therefore not ordained to the priesthood.

The Philadelphia ordinations were a clear indication of the urgency felt within significant sections of the Episcopal Church for women to be ordained. They also raised serious questions as to the nature of ministry, the meaning of ordination, and the authority and meaning of the episcopacy. These questions have not yet been resolved. Despite the decision of the House of Bishops in declaring the 1974 ordinations as invalid, many people regarded those ordinations as fully valid and meaningful. Philadelphia caused a re-examination of church belief and dogma which is still continuing today.

The ordinations in Philadelphia were followed by a second group of ordinations, this time in Washington D.C. in September 1975. Here another four women were irregularly ordained to the priesthood, bringing the total to fifteen women in the anomalous position of being ordained, yet not recognized as priests. This situation, in which the women priests were simply ignored by the leaders of the church, continued until the 1976 General Convention.

In 1975 the fifth Assembly of the WCC in Nairobi devoted several sessions to the question of sexism in the church and in the world. It recognized that the concerns of women must

be included in all the deliberations of the WCC.<sup>63</sup> Women's full membership of the Body of Christ was too often ignored in the Church. Yet until they were permitted to participate fully in the life of their church, there would continue to be a grave obstacle to the realization of full unity in the church. The Assembly specified that change was necessary in theological and cultural assumptions about women. It was important that language about God be inclusive, and the mystery of God be recognized to transcend all human metaphors and images. Member churches of the WCC should examine their liturgical language and practices in order to eliminate any sexism so that women may be fully part of the worshipping community. The WCC urged those churches which did not have theological objections to the ordination of women not to be deterred from action by ecumenical considerations.

1975 proved a significant year for the Church of England. The Synod debated a report by the Standing Committee entitled The Ordination of Women. The report was received, and the Bishop of Oxford moved "That this Synod considers that there are no fundamental objections to the ordination of women to the priesthood".<sup>64</sup> The Bishop outlined his belief in the rightness of women's ordination, arguing that the concept of God in the Church has changed considerably over the past hundred and fifty years, and the concept of God's ministry must thus change also. He stated that the arguments put forward against women's ordination seemed to

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63. Report of the Fifth W.C.C. Assembly, Nairobi, 1975, p.107.

64. Church of England General Synod Report 1975, p.542.

him to reflect an old world of discourse that is no longer with us.

The Bishop of Chichester spoke against the motion, arguing that the ordination of women would be a rejection of the ancient tradition of the universal church. This tradition itself constituted a fundamental objection. Furthermore, there was the fact that Jesus chose only men as his Apostles, which could have been a deliberate act rather than one dictated by social circumstances. There was also the fact that the Incarnation took place in a man and not a woman. And finally there were the Pauline texts regarding women to be considered. None of these were simple or easy questions but they had to be answered before a motion such as the one under debate could be passed.

Mr G.E. Duffield, a vehement opponent of women's ordination in the church, supported the Bishop of Chichester on the Pauline texts regarding "kephale" which he translated as "headship". He argued that the headship of men over women is a basic creation principle. A woman should not try to be like a man, but "... should develop her own specific gifts and glory in her femininity".<sup>65</sup> Christianity should not be influenced by secular movements such as "Women's Lib" but should work out its own theology of sexuality.

The Archbishop of Canterbury argued strongly that the Church must not circumscribe the movement of the Holy Spirit. He believed that the Spirit was leading the church towards

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65. Ibid., p.453.

women's ordination, and he asked for openness, tolerance and love in the working out of this issue.

After some further debate the Bishop of Oxford again put his motion, with the following result:

	<u>Ayes</u>	<u>Noes</u>	<u>Abstentions</u>
House of Bishops	28	10	0
House of Clergy	110	96	2
House of Laity	117	74	3

The motion was therefore carried. A very significant step had thereby been taken, opening the way to the eventual ordination of women in the Church of England.

The debate was resumed later, and Canon P.A. Welsby put the motion, "That this Synod, in view of the significant division of opinion reflected in the diocesan voting, considers that it would not be right to remove the legal and other barriers to the ordination of women".<sup>66</sup> Canon Welsby stated that in the Provinces of Canterbury and York, 28 out of 43 dioceses are in favour of this motion. With only 15 in favour of the removal of all barriers to the ordination of women, it would be irresponsible for the Synod to act immediately in removing these barriers. An opportunity should thus be provided for calm reflection, and after due course the matter should be considered again.

Canon G.D.J. Walsh opposed the motion, arguing that motives of emotion, insecurity, prejudice and conservatism were

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66. Ibid., p.544.

tragic reasons for delaying the ordination of women. If God was calling women to the priesthood then all the worries about ecumenical relations and divisions in the church might be safely left in His hands.

Canon Professor G.W.H. Lampe, a tireless advocate of the ordination of women, agreed strongly with Canon Walsh, as did the Bishops of Chelmsford and Winchester. The Bishop of Derby then moved an amendment to the motion to insert after the words "it would not be right" the words "at present". The amendment was put and carried. After some further debate the motion was put to the Synod:

	<u>Ayes</u>	<u>Noes</u>	<u>Abstentions</u>
House of Bishops	19	14	1
House of Clergy	127	74	0
House of Laity	80	96	0

The motion was therefore lost in the House of Laity.

Canon G.D.J. Walsh then moved:

That this Synod considers that the Church of England should now proceed to remove the legal and other barriers to the ordination of women, and requests the Standing Committee, to prepare and bring forward the necessary legislation.<sup>67</sup>

After little debate the motion was put as follows:

	<u>Ayes</u>	<u>Noes</u>	<u>Abstentions</u>
House of Bishops	15	15	0
House of Clergy	78	108	4
House of Laity	101	64	3

The motion was therefore lost in the House of Clergy.

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67. Ibid., p.545.

Canon R.C. Cranston then moved:

That this Synod invites the House of Bishops, when, in the light of developments in the Anglican Communion generally as well as in this country, they judge the time for action to be right, to bring about the Synod a proposal to admit women to the priesthood.<sup>68</sup>

The motion was put and carried.

The Reverend L.C. Moss then moved:

That this Synod, not wishing to prejudice improving relations with the Roman Catholic Church and Orthodox Churches by removing prematurely the legal and other barriers to the ordination of some in the Church of England, requests the President to:

(1) inform the appropriate authorities in those Churches of its belief that there are no fundamental objections to such ordination; and

(2) invite those authorities to share in the urgent examination of the theological and other implications of the removal of those barriers by the Church of England.<sup>69</sup>

The Bishop of Winchester moved as an amendment:

In line 3 leave out 'prematurely' and insert 'without consultation with them'.

The amendment was put and carried.

The motion as amended was put and carried.

Finally, the Bishop of Guildford moved:

That this Synod requests the House of Bishops, in consultation with the Anglican Council for the Church's Ministry, to give consideration to the practical and pastoral implications of ordaining women to the priesthood, and particularly such matters as recruitment, selection, training, spheres of ministry, and the marriage relationship, and to bring in due course a report to the General Synod.<sup>70</sup>

The motion was narrowly lost.

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68. Ibid., p.547.

69. Ibid., p.547.

70. Ibid., p.549.

The Synod had thus declared itself in favour of the ordination of women, but was not yet prepared to implement that position. A further period of delay was inevitable.

In 1976 the CPSA received a report on the ordination of women. The Provincial Synod welcomed the report, but postponed discussion of it until it had been translated into the other major languages used in the CPSA. Provincial Synod also requested Episcopal Synod "to consider the possibility of fuller study being made for and against the ordination of women for submission together with the report on Patterns of Ministry and the Ordination of Women to the next Provincial Synod".<sup>71</sup>

The report on the ordination of women stated that the question was not one to which the New Testament gave a clear answer. Jesus called no woman to be an apostle. St Paul recognized a ministry of women, but excluded women from public teaching. The Church Fathers excluded women from the priesthood. The Commission concluded that they could not agree that there were no theological objections to the ordination of women. Similarly, on psychological grounds, the Commission suggested that women priests could cause difficulties. However they concluded that they could not predict the consequences of women's ordination with any confidence. On the ecumenical question, however, they were more definite. The Commission stated that unity with the Catholic and Orthodox Churches was of primary importance.

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71. CPSA Provincial Synod Report 1976, p.77.



"... unity with such a large body of Christians should have priority in our thinking before we approached questions of less importance such as the ordination of women".<sup>72</sup> Unity with the Protestant Churches, however, would not be impaired by a refusal to ordain women, in the opinion of the Commission. They therefore concluded that little would be gained in ordaining women and Christian unity would be severely hampered. The Holy Spirit was not guiding the Catholic churches towards women's ordination. The evidence of tradition, practical considerations and tribal custom all provided further evidence against the ordination of women. The Commission therefore recommended more opportunities for women to practise their own kind of ministry but not within Holy Orders.

In the same year as this report was produced in South Africa, a very different conclusion was reached in the United States. A meeting of the House of Deputies was held to debate the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate on September 16th, 1976. The chairperson of the Committee on Ministry presented Report No. 3 of the Committee:

Resolved ... that a new Section I of Title III, Canon 9 be adopted ... to read as follows:

Section I. The provisions of these canons for the admission of Candidates, and for the Ordination to the three Orders, Bishops, Priests and Deacons, shall be equally applicable to men and women.<sup>73</sup>

72. The Report on the Bishops' Commission on the Ordination of Women, 1976.

73. ECUSA General Convention 1976, p.D64.

The principle of the ordination of women had already been passed by the House of Bishops in 1972, but in 1973 the House of Deputies had rejected it. At this second hearing a very lengthy debate took place, with twenty-nine deputies speaking for the resolution, and the same number against. A vote by orders was then called. The results of the ballot were as follows:

Clerical :	114 votes cast
	58 votes needed for affirmative action
	60 votes yes
	39 votes no
	15 votes divided
Lay :	113 votes cast
	57 votes needed for affirmative action
	64 votes yes
	36 votes no
	13 votes divided

The resolution was therefore carried in both orders. The House of Deputies had at last affirmed the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate. But the votes had been close, and there remained many dissenters. The Reverend K.E. Trueman, Deputy from Milwaukee, read a statement on behalf of those dissenters,

We stand committed to the Episcopal Church, and we are determined to live and work within it. We cannot accept with a good conscience the action of this House.

Furthermore, we cannot acknowledge the authenticity of this General Convention to decide unilaterally and in the face of the expressed disapproval of our Roman, Old Catholic and Orthodox Brethren, a question which ought to be decided by ecumenical consensus.

The ordination and consecration of women priests and bishops will raise for us the gravest questions: That is, how far this church can accept such ministrations without fatally compromising its position as a Catholic and Apostolic body. We ask our brothers and sisters

in this house to take to heart our resolution. We ask the whole Church to take note of our unshaken loyalty to the Episcopal Church, its teachings, its spirituality, its priesthood and its sacraments.<sup>74</sup>

Several days after this historic vote had taken place, the House of Bishops met to discuss the pastoral concerns related to the ordination of women. The spokesperson for the Committee of Theology offered some guidelines respecting the future status of the women who had undergone priesthood ordination prior to the House of Deputies' vote. It was recognized that a completion of the ritual acts performed at Philadelphia and Washington was now possible and necessary. There were two options for doing this. The first option would be that the appropriate diocesan bishop would conduct a public event recognizing the sacramental elements found in the Philadelphia and Washington services and incorporating these elements into the recent intention of the church to ordain women to the presbyterate. The newly legislated ecclesial decision would complete the earlier ritual and the ordinand would be canonically commissioned as a priest without an additional laying on of hands.

An alternative option, greatly preferred by a majority of the Committee, was a notion referred to as "conditional ordination". Conditional ordination would recognize that something of great significance did indeed take place at Philadelphia and Washington. It would also assure both the ordinand and the people of the church that the ordained person was an "authorized channel for divine grace". In so doing it would demonstrate the church's concern for those

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74. Ibid., p.D68.

who had honest doubts about the validity of the previous ordinations. The participation of the women ordinands in a conditional ordination service would be a valuable and healing contribution to reconciliation with the church which was so deeply needed at that time. This second option was accepted by a majority of the House. It was therefore resolved, the House of Deputies concurring, that each diocesan bishop and ordinand would celebrate a conditional ordination service, with all the canonical procedures required for such a service fulfilled.

The following day the Bishop of Central Florida presented a statement of conscience on behalf of himself and a number of colleagues stating their distress at the decision of the Convention to authorize the ordination of women to the priesthood and the episcopate. They indicated the great difficulty they found in accepting this action, and their fears of the anomaly it would introduce into the ministry of the church. Furthermore, they pointed out that there was no consensus within the Church on this issue. There was less than a two-thirds majority in the House of Bishops, and only a bare majority in the House of Deputies. And the action was not irreversible.

Many people still felt a deep problem of conscience in receiving the sacrament from a woman celebrant. They experienced serious doubts about the authenticity of the priesthood conferred upon women. However the statement indicated the writers' willingness to wait upon guidance

from the Holy Spirit, and to pray for the unity of the church.

Later that day a resolution was tabled, the House of Deputies concurring, that no bishop, priest, deacon or lay person should be coerced, penalized or suffer any canonical disability as a result of the General Convention's decision to ordain women to the priesthood. This resolution was carried with a vote of seventy for and fifty-three against the notion. After this debate a second statement of conscience was read out to the House. This stated the unhappiness of the authors with the recent decision of the House to implement a conditional ordination service to regularize the ordinations of the fourteen women ordained at Philadelphia and Washington. The Bishop of West Missouri then suggested that the entire report of the Committee of Theology be adopted, making either option within it available to bishops. Each bishop could then choose which option to implement in accordance with his own conscience. A motion to reconsider the earlier resolution which had opted for the conditional ordination option was agreed. A resolution to adopt the entire report of the Committee of Theology was moved and adopted.

Thus in 1976 the ECUSA formally opened the presbyterate and episcopate to women equally with men. The Episcopal Church immediately had fourteen women priests. Many more were to follow.

The Anglican Consultative Council in 1976 encouraged the mutual acceptance of the various member churches which did not ordain women to the priesthood. It was already clear that there would be considerable diversity of practice within the Communion on this issue. The report of the meeting noted that, "It is evident ... that there is within Anglicanism an increasing acceptance of the principle that women may be ordained to the priesthood".<sup>75</sup> It went on to insist that, "The Anglican Communion faces an opportunity as decisions about ordaining women to the priesthood give way to action and the number of women priests is increased. It is the opportunity to give witness to diversity without breaking the bonds of love which bind us in one communion".<sup>76</sup>

1976 was indeed a momentous year in the development of the debate. In May 1976 the Church of the Province of New Zealand passed the bill for the ordination of women, with a year to elapse before implementation. In the Church of Ireland, the principle of the ordination of women was approved in May 1976. In November 1976, six women were ordained priests in the Anglican Church of Canada, and in November the House of Bishops of the Province of Kenya accepted the principle of the ordination of women. The Standing Committee of Provincial Synod met shortly afterwards and affirmed that any woman in the Province who felt called to the priesthood would be examined by her bishop in the same way as all other candidates.

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75. Anglican Consultative Council Meeting, Trinidad, 1976.

76. Ibid.

### Chapter 3: A KEY AND DIVISIVE ISSUE: 1978-1986

In May 1978 the CPSA's monthly magazine Seek carried an article from the Provincial Synod Commission on the ordination of women. The article maintained that every church member was called to share in Christ's work. Leadership in the church should thus be helping people discover what their calling should be, and coordinating different gifts into a team ministry. The article asked whether women could exercise these roles. It then discussed the issues involved in such a question. The Pauline letters, it concluded, related very much to their own time. Customs had changed, and the CPSA had decided that women can teach, preach and act as lay ministers. Women and men, in a complementary way, could share in the priestly work of the Church. Jesus could be represented by all Christians. The article ended by encouraging its readers to think about the issues.

The Lambeth Conference in 1978 devoted considerable attention to the ordination of women in the Anglican Communion. The issue was first discussed in a hearing which was introduced by Canon Professor John Macquarrie. The hearing was for the purpose of sharing information and experience on the issue, and of assessing its likely effects upon the Communion. Shortly after this, Resolution 21,<sup>1</sup> entitled Women in the Priesthood, was introduced. In this the Conference noted that women had been ordained to the

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1. Report of the Lambeth Conference, 1978, pp.45-47.

priesthood in several member churches. A number of others had approved the principle, whilst some were undecided and others fundamentally opposed to women priests. There was pain and distress on both sides of the debate, and healing and fellowship were a primary responsibility of all members of the church. The Conference recognized the autonomy of each of its member churches, acknowledging the legal right of each church to make its own decision. Such decisions, however, had significant consequences for the Communion as a whole, and unity within the Communion needed to be preserved. The Conference therefore encouraged all member churches to remain in communion with each other, notwithstanding differences on the issue of women's ordination. It urged that every action possible should be taken to ensure that all members of the church should continue to be in communion with each other irrespective of their convictions about the issue. The Anglican Consultative Council should promote dialogue between those member churches which do, and do not, ordain women, and should maintain and extend dialogue with churches outside the Anglican Communion. The Conference declared its acceptance of those member churches which did ordain women, and of those which did not, and urged mutual respect between the groups. It requested that ordained women exercised their priesthood only where pastoral need warranted, and where their ministry was acceptable to the bishop, clergy and people of the area concerned.

The Conference recognized that their acceptance of member churches which ordained women priests might disappoint the Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Old Catholic churches, but



maintained that diversity within unity of faith and worship was part of the Anglican heritage. It hoped that dialogue with these churches would continue. Finally the report urged that further discussions of the issue should be held within the wider consideration of the areas of ministry and priesthood. Resolution 21 was passed with 316 votes in favour, 37 against and 17 abstentions.

The Conference next briefly considered the question of women in the episcopate. It recommended that no such consecration should take place without consultation with the episcopate through the primates, and without overwhelming support in the diocese concerned and in the church in general. The bishop's office should not become a focus for disunity.

The Lambeth delegates also looked at the question of women's ordination within the context of ministry. The unity of the Communion was of primary importance and entailed an acceptance of different ministries and a willingness to work together. The Conference expressed concern about the pastoral needs of women, both those who were ordained yet unacceptable to many people, and those who were denied ordination solely because they were women. It was no less concerned for those who opposed the ordination of women to the priesthood, and insisted that both groups were equally welcome and valuable to the church. The Conference wholeheartedly supported the full participation of lay women in the ministry of the church, on the same terms as lay men (Resolution 38). It recognized the very great contribution made by women to the life of the church, and emphasized its conviction that "... only as women are fully accepted as

members of the Body of Christ in its mission and ministry can it be said that the Body is moving towards completeness ...".<sup>2</sup>

Women in the diaconate was another area briefly considered at the Conference. Resolution 32(c) of the 1968 conference was endorsed, recommending that women be ordained to the Order of Deacons instead of to a separate Order of Deaconesses.

The Conference devoted considerable attention to the human rights and dignity of men and women. In Section 1, entitled "What is the Church For?", item 4H emphasized that humankind - both men and women - are made in the image of God. This image, distorted by sin, had only once been fully realized, in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus "... perfects humanity by his obedience to God and sacrificial self-gift to his fellowmen, and offers, through the relationship with himself established in baptism, the opportunity of restoring the image of God in fallen humanity. Christians know from this relationship that God's will and purpose is that all men and women should have equal dignity".<sup>3</sup> Continuing this concern, Resolution 10(1) focused on the relationship between the sexes, and commended to the church the need for a theological study of sexuality which related sexual relationships to the wholeness of human life. That wholeness of life was derived from God, who was the source of femininity and masculinity.

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2. Report of the Lambeth Conference 1978, p.80.

3. Ibid., p.71.

God was neither masculine nor feminine, but the source of both, and of all human characteristics called masculine and feminine. God's nature was reflected in the balance and interaction between these characteristics. The wholeness of God was directly expressed by the love between a man and a woman. The wholeness of God was also present in each individual, whose total sexuality was expressed in his/her feminine and masculine characteristics. The conference ended its discussion on a high note: "the Christian life holds in balance the masculine and the feminine qualities. God's wholeness sets us free. He calls us into mature relationships of interdependence with each other - to forgive as we are forgiven, to love as we are loved - our fragmented sexuality transformed by his wholeness. We commend the study of this theme to the Church, as offering a true basis for all sexual relationships."<sup>4</sup>

The final reference to women's ordination is in the Appendix to the Report, where a speech on the subject made by Professor John Macquarrie is recorded. Professor Macquarrie approached the issue by observing that women's ordination to the priesthood was no longer an academic question - women priests already existed in some churches in the Anglican Communion. For this reason he did not wish to reiterate the familiar arguments for and against, but to approach the question differently. He intended to do this in three ways. Firstly, to sort the different arguments into categories, to critically evaluate these categories and to discover how to recognize each and what weight to attach to each. Secondly, to ask what was meant by a "consensus" - how much agreement

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4. Ibid., p.64.

should there be before a major innovation such as the ordination of women was implemented. And thirdly, how individual churches in the Communion should relate to each other concerning this issue, and, finally, how the Communion as a whole, should relate to other churches.

He turned initially to the analysis and evaluation of the arguments. Every theology came out of a particular historical situation and was culturally and sociologically conditioned. This, for Macquarrie, was a problem for many of the arguments which maintainers of an all-male priesthood derived from the New Testament. Equally, however, the sociological critique of theology itself needed to be criticized. Those who criticized the cultural bias in the tradition were often themselves operating within one of the modern secular ideologies.

Next, Macquarrie considered the question of consensus. This, he felt, could not mean everyone thinking alike. There had always to be a minority view which indeed was necessary to stimulate and challenge the majority. However, the ordination of women to the priesthood was so novel a step that it demanded a high degree of consensus if it was not to cause deep divisions in the Communion. A two-thirds majority in each synodical house was advocated.

Thirdly, Macquarrie examined the state of the Communion in which some churches ordained women and others did not. He put this problem into perspective by pointing out that while in Christianity there were some central doctrines which made up the core of Christian faith, there were others which would not cause Christianity to stand or fall. Thus,

Macquarrie concluded, the churches within the Communion and other churches, could surely still work together on the many areas of agreement which they had in common and avoid falling into dispute over issues which were not at the heart of the Christian faith.

In November 1978 the Church of England Synod met, and again debated the issue. In this debate its main advocate for the ordination of women was the Bishop of Birmingham, the Right Reverend H.W. Montefiore, who moved:

That this Synod asks the Standing Committee to prepare and bring forward legislation to remove the barriers to the ordination of women to the priesthood and their consecration to the episcopate.<sup>5</sup>

The Bishop stated his belief that there were no fundamental objections to the ordination of women to the priesthood, as the majority of the Synod had voted in 1975. He declared this to be a matter of truth, and continued, "I dare not put quick reunion, or even the immediate welfare of the church, before the claims of truth".<sup>6</sup> He argued that for the priesthood to be fully representative of Christians in modern times it must include both sexes. For it to be fully representative of God, the same was the case. For God is neither male or female. And in the Incarnation the essential belief was that God became anthopos not aner. Finally the Bishop appealed for mutual love and acceptance between those who believed in the truth of the ordination of women and those who did not.

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5. General Synod Report of the Church of England 1978, p.986.

6. Ibid., p.996.

The Bishop of Truro argued that the issue of the ordination of women to the priesthood was too big for such a small section of Christians as the Anglican Communion to decide by itself. An all male priesthood was part of the historic ministry of the church, founded on Scripture. It was not an accident of history that God became incarnate as a male. In the order of Creation headship and authority were symbolically and fundamentally associated with maleness.

Dame Betty Ridley spoke for an affirmative vote for the motion. She pointed out the member churches of the Anglican Communion had already ordained women, so that the ecumenical problems thereby incurred could not any longer be avoided.

The Archbishop of Canterbury spoke of the function of the Holy Spirit in opening Christian minds to the recognition of truth. He warned that tradition can petrify, and pointed out that there had been many instances in history where a minority had, after long struggle, finally brought to the acceptance of the Church a truth hitherto unrealized by it.

The Reverend Professor D.R. Jones pointed out that the Judeo-Christian tradition had always been male-dominated, particularly so in the Protestant Churches. He argued that the drive towards including women in the ministry of the church represented a strong reaction to that domination and a move to obtain proper representation of both male and female in the body of Christ.

Professor Sir Norman Anderson argued that the passages in the New Testament concerning women maintaining silence in church, asking their husbands questions at home, and wearing veils, were clearly culturally conditioned. However he expressed the feeling that 1 Cor 11 and 1 Tim 2 went beyond culture to point to an order of creation and nature. The Reverend J.C. Broadhurst supported this speech, arguing that the ordination of women was contrary to Scripture and tradition, and was a grave attack on the doctrine of the Incarnation.

Canon A.C. Hall compared the situation of the present Synod with the Council of Jerusalem described in Acts 15. On the one side was the weight of tradition, of Scripture, of what was believed to be divinely revealed law; on the other side was a group of Christians who believed that the Spirit of God was given equally to Jews and Gentiles regardless of circumcision. Doubtless Jewish proponents of the former view argued that Jesus had given no hint of such a radical step, and that the Council had no authority to alter the law of Moses and the long tradition. Yet in the end their decision was to recognize and welcome the action of God. However God was not seen as having made a mistake about circumcision; rather it was understood that he was revealing more about himself. The Council decided to act without waiting for a consensus among Jewish believers, which might never have been reached.

After some further debate the motion was put

	Ayes	Noes
House of Bishops	32	27
House of Clergy	94	149
House of Laity	120	106

The motion was therefore lost in the House of Clergy. The Church of England was still not ready to accept women priests.

In February 1979 the Church of England synod reconvened, and a brief statement was made by the chairperson to the effect that discussions on the question of the ordination of women to the priesthood were taking place with the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches. The Church of England was also keeping in close touch with other churches in the Reformed tradition which already ordained women to the ministry. The debate was thus taking on a stronger ecumenical dimension for the Church of England. The Episcopal Church in the United States was also investigating ecumenical questions, but from the viewpoint of a church which already had women priests. A report by the Joint Commission on Ecumenicity stated at the 1979 ECUSA General Convention that the ordination of women to the priesthood was an obstacle to unity with the Orthodox Church. The Roman Catholic Church had supporters on both sides of the question, whilst women priests were an advantage to unity with non-episcopal churches. Thus the ecumenical question provided both problems and advantages to the ordination of women.

The Church of England Synod meeting in July 1979 debated the issue of women priests ordained abroad, but wishing to



practise in Britain. Anglican priests from abroad were generally accepted and welcomed with alacrity in the Church of England. However a motion to accept foreign women priests was defeated by the House of Clergy. Consequently, the anomaly remains whereby men and women in the identical orders from other countries in the Communion are differentiated upon their arrival in Britain - men are permitted to practise their priesthood, but women are not.

The WCC held a conference on Women, Human Rights and Mission in Venice in 1979. Here the primary concern was with the sex discrimination which was still so widespread in the world. Women, it was noted, still formed the majority of the illiterate, the poor, the undernourished, the unskilled and the unemployed. Women still had little or no say in decisions affecting their national and private lives. The conference felt strongly that the concerns of women were an integral part of the Church's responsibility. "Women's struggle for liberation is an important dimension of the Christian struggle for freedom and justice."<sup>7</sup> The conference urged that the churches in the different countries recognize the oppression of women and work with women to build a church and society where all could reach their human potential.

1979 was also an important year for the CPSA, for the Theological Commission made its report on the ordination of women to the priesthood, commissioned by Episcopal Synod in 1976. The commission recognized in its introduction that it started its investigations from premises which almost

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7. Report on the WCC Conference on Women, Human Rights and Mission, Venice 1979, p.1.

inevitably led to a questioning of the ordination of women. Although it produced no definite conclusions, the overall impression of the investigation was against women's ordination. The commission understood the Genesis stories of creation to mean that men had the role of head of the family; this expressed the headship of God in creation. In Genesis 3 this principle was disregarded. The woman took the decision and the man followed her, and the outcome was a disaster. This story has a timeless significance, indicating the principles of God's creation. Paul continued this teaching, and spoke with authority on the roles of men and women. The differences of these roles and the headship of man over woman were not principles in their own right, but relationships in Christ.

The Commission believed that both men and women were called to ministry in the Church. The church had to repent of having failed to provide opportunities for women's ministry, and had to make good this failure. However, the scriptural model for the relationship of men and women was of a partnership in which the role of leadership, protection and final responsibility rested with the man. In the New Testament the exercise of certain gifts appeared to differ between men and women, particularly with regard to ultimate authority in the church and the public teaching of church doctrine. The New Testament also pointed to the three-fold ministry of the church. The Commission believed there was good New Testament evidence for the ordination of women to the diaconate. However the New Testament evidence on the priesthood was against women priests. As the man was the head of the household, so the priest as the head of a part

of God's household had to be a man. Christ as the bridegroom and the Church as the bride made it difficult for anyone but a male to be the true icon of Christ in the liturgy. Christ did not choose women to be among his twelve apostles, and the tradition of the church had ordained only men to the priesthood.

The commission recognized several arguments in favour of the ordination of women to the priesthood. There was the new position of women in early Christianity over against Judaism. Jesus was a male, but primarily he was a human being. Woman should thus be able to represent him. New developments in the history of the world may have indicated God's involvement in his creation, and thus demanded new patterns of ministry. It was possible that Rom 16:7 referred to a female apostle. And a woman - the Queen - was the supreme head of the Church of England today.

The Committee touched briefly on the ecumenical problems connected with the issue. It asked if the question of the ordination of women as priests affected central doctrines of the Christian faith, or if it was a peripheral question on which Christians could disagree and still remain united or seek unity. The secular world's demand for women's equality was considered but the committee was unsure if this was an expression of the mind of God. It also expressed uncertainty as to the African stance on the issue. The committee finally indicated the need in the CPSA to listen to the voice of God on the question as eagerly as proponents and opponents of women priests defended their positions.

The CPSA synod took note of this report when it debated the issue at its 1979 meeting. The synod made no firm decision on the issue, but rather postponed making a decision, stating that it,

Believes that it would ... not be right at this time to proceed with the ordination of women to the priesthood or the episcopate in the CPSA;

Believes that it is theologically appropriate for women as well as men to be ordained to the diaconate;

Requests the Synod of Bishops, if and when they believe that the time is right to do so, to call a further Commission at some future time to advise Provincial Synod about the theology and practical implications of the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate.<sup>8</sup>

The voting was strongly in favour of the resolution in all three houses. Thus a decision on the ordination of women to the priesthood was again postponed. The synod did, however, accept the principle of the ordination of women to the diaconate. But there were no moves made to begin implementing that decision. At this synod, too, there was a question tabled asking if any women had declared to their bishops a vocation to the priesthood. The reply was that eleven women had done so, from six dioceses.

In late 1979 the ecumenical aspect of the debate on the ordination of women was thoroughly investigated by a WCC consultation in Strasbourg. Protestant, Orthodox, Anglican, Old Catholic and Roman Catholic participants attended the conference. Each side of the debate expressed their difficulty in considering union with the other side.<sup>9</sup> The

8. CPSA General Synod Report 1979, p.65.

9. Ordination of Women in Ecumenical Perspective. Report of a W.C.C. Consultation held at Strasbourg in August-September 1979, Constance F. Parvey (ed.).

Protestant delegates emphasized the fact that much was said about the refusal of those churches that did not ordain women to recognize the ministries of those churches that did. However churches with women ministers had equally serious problems with the ministries of churches excluding women from the ordained ministry. A survey in 1975 showed just over a third of the WCC member churches ordained women to the priesthood, most of these being in the traditions of the Reformation. Within most of the churches not ordaining women there was debate taking place, varying considerably from church to church. The Orthodox Church had little internal debate on the issue, whilst the Roman Catholic Church had a great deal, with many theologians being in favour of the priesthood for women, while those in official circles were mainly against the idea. Within churches that did ordain women, the acceptance and accommodation of women ministers also differed considerably. The team ministry of men and women working together was beginning to receive recognition and appreciation in many churches.

The Consultation pointed out that in most churches the decision whether or not to ordain women was still largely being made by men. However most churches were growing to believe that women should have more roles and ministries in the churches open to them. The WCC declaration that there could be no unity in the churches which neglected the full humanity and dignity of women was becoming widely accepted. The Consultation also stressed that the ecumenical movement was a growing concept within churches.

There are also signs of a new ecumenical movement emerging from within the churches themselves. Steps actively to engage people who live in

situations of racial and economic oppression, who are handicapped or poor and to recruit women are signs that a new community in Christ could look much different from what has sometimes been envisioned. This changing situation makes it all the more important to underline that the ecumenical movement is more than the sum total of the member churches. It must also reflect a broad base of present Christian experience.<sup>10</sup>

The Consultation went on to consider the different understandings of biblical anthropology and of priesthood held by the different churches. Some churches believed in a dominant/subordinate structure of male/female relationships; others in a structure of complete equality. For some churches the representative role of a priest was primarily in persona ecclesiae; for others it was in persona Christi. The first group advocated women priests as well as men priests as more fully representative of the church. The second group saw the male sex of the priest as deeply symbolic of Christ the man. And some churches did not maintain the representative role of the ministry at all.

Similarly, the images used to describe God were regarded very differently. For some, the question was novel and they saw no relevance to the ordination of women. For others, the question was central to the task of creating a theology of God inclusive of both male and female experience. The maleness of Christ was a barrier to women priests for some. For others, Christ was more fully portrayed by a shared priesthood of men and women.

Next, the Consultation discussed various aspects of the ministry of the Christian church. The way in which a church

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10. WCC Publication, Ordination of Women in Ecumenical Perspective, Constance F. Parvey (ed.), 1980, p.21.

tradition described the nature of the ministry influenced its views on women's ordination. The ministry as service; the priest as icon; different understandings meant different conclusions on the issue. The understanding of apostolic succession was similarly influential upon the view of ministry. The maleness of the historical Jesus was an important factor in the understanding of ministry, as were various views of the roles of men and women in creation.

The Consultation ended its discussions with a number of recommendations:

- that the churches eliminate discrimination against women, sometimes called "sexism", e.g. in matters of equality, dignity, access to positions, salaries;
- that the churches, acknowledging this to be a "burning" issue now in the church, pursue it seriously, with papers prepared for study by the churches;
- that the churches, in discussing ordination of women, involve women directly in the official decision-making process;
- that the churches further the participation of women in ecumenical discussions on ministry;
- that the churches set up commissions to study the relations between women and men in Church and society.<sup>11</sup>

These recommendations could possibly have contributed to the motion put to the General Synod of the Church of England in July 1980, when it was proposed that official discussions be initiated with the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Churches and other episcopally ordered bodies on the subjects of the ordination of women and the ministry of women. After a brief debate the motion was carried.

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11. Ibid., p.41.

Already in 1979 it had been recorded that such discussions were taking place, but they were now being placed on an official level.

The WCC was devoting a considerable amount of attention and effort to the question of women's ordination at this time. Its 1981 conference in Sheffield centred upon an investigation of women and men in the church. The issue of women's ordination to the priesthood was not primarily an issue of justice for women, but an issue of unity, having to do with one baptism into the body of Christ and one mission to serve Christ in bringing in his kingdom. Men and women were created equally in God's image for life in community, a life distinguished by peace and justice, freedom and fullness, joy and love, unity in diversity. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie, addressed the conference and said that whilst women had traditionally been understood solely in terms of their home-making and child-bearing roles, the ministry had become a masculine professional status occupation. It was time for the churches to regain a wider concept of ministry for both sexes.

Following Archbishop Runcie, the General Secretary of the WCC, Philip Potter, spoke. He emphasized the need within the churches for liberation from sexism and for a truly human life for all people as a community in church and society. Expressing deep concern for the present-day understanding of the gospel message, he argued that,

... the way in which the relations of men and women have been dealt with in the Scriptures themselves and the way in which we have interpreted what the Scriptures have said have



brought seriously into question how we understand the total revelation of God in Christ expressed in the whole canon of the Scriptures. We have systematically left aside as our criterion of judgement the central nature of God's revelation and have clung to all the things that strengthen and confirm our attitudes of domination and hierarchical oppression.<sup>12</sup>

Hierarchy was a serious corruption within the Church, warned Potter. The whole concept of ministry had to change. Ministry meant servanthood, but had been changed into structures of hierarchy and patriarchy.

We know that the servant is one who empties himself or herself, not seeking to have power and domination. We talk about the servant church but, in the whole length and breadth of the life of the church, we have set up all kinds of individual and corporate forms of hierarchy which enshrine power attitudes and structures.<sup>13</sup>

Potter also warned against the dangers of placing too much emphasis on tradition. He felt that there was a great need to rewrite church history as the history of women and men; existing church history largely depicted a history of men.

Elizabeth Moltmann-Wendel and Jürgen Moltmann also expressed concern at the patriarchal structure of the churches. They explained that Christianity inherited this structure from earlier religions and social structures, and was unable successfully to discard it. The living God has thus been distorted in a patriarchal system with its idols of power and domination. Patriarchy in the churches, they believed, has been and is still, linked with capitalism, colonialism, sexism and racism. "The life of our churches is based on

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12. Constance F. Parvey, The Community of Women and Men in the Church, (Geneva: W.C.C. Publications, 1983), p.26.

13. Ibid., p.26.

patriarchal patterns of behaviour from which no new community can possibly grow today."<sup>14</sup>

Another powerful speaker at this conference was Tissa Balasuriya. He argued that dominated groups, such as those who suffered from poverty, racism and sexism, were seen as existing for the use of the dominant. Even psychologically the dominated were made to accept the values and beliefs of the dominant group. Thus men tended to determine the roles and values of women. In a male-dominated society men were more important and women were the help-mates. Men controlled the power structures. In the churches, if the power was largely in the hands of the ordained clergy, and women were excluded from ordination to the priesthood, the result was a form of discrimination which denied women the opportunity of exercising power and participating as responsible persons in the life of the Church.

The WCC Conference at Sheffield indicated a profound understanding and insight into the problem of discrimination against women and its possible connections with the church's long refusal to ordain women to the priesthood. There was expressed there a depth of concern and a commitment to the liberation of women from oppressive structures both within the church and in society at large. Such a concern and commitment moved the study on the ordination of women far beyond the usual parameters of debate within which the Anglican Communion was still operating.

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14. Ibid., p.38.

In November 1981 in the Church of England a report by the House of Bishops entitled The Deaconess Order and the Diaconate was debated. The Bishop of Portsmouth introduced the report, pointing out that the Order of Deaconesses had for many years suffered from an undefined status within the hierarchy of the church. Deaconesses underwent the process of ordination but were generally not regarded as being in Holy Orders. However the Lambeth Conferences of 1968 and 1978 had stated that the ordination of a deaconess did confer Holy Orders, and recommended that deaconesses be declared to be within the diaconate. The House of Bishops therefore proposed that there be within the Church of England a single diaconal order open to both men and women.

The Bishop of Norwich referred to the fears of some of the members that admitting women to the diaconate was moving towards admitting women to the priesthood. He argued that the problems inherent in the latter issue did not pertain in the case of the diaconate, and that furthermore, the biblical evidence of women deacons: Phoebe, Nymphas, Lydia, etc. - was extremely strong.

The Reverend P.J. Geldard, a fierce opponent to the entrance of women into Holy Orders, expressed his belief that the Church of England could not make certain decisions alone, but only in conjunction with the rest of Christendom. He also declared his concern for ecumenism and for refraining from placing obstacles in the path of unity. He finally requested that the understanding of the diaconate be clarified before it be shared with women.

After some further debate the motion was put:

That this Synod, believing that within the historic threefold ministry the Order of Deacons is an order open to women, asks the Standing Committee to prepare legislation to ensure that, from a future date, all candidates - both men and women, sponsored for diaconal service should be admitted to the Order of Deacons and to make provision for the admission to the Order of Deacons of those previously admitted to the Order of Deaconesses who so desire.<sup>15</sup>

The motion was put and carried.

The Bishop of Portsmouth then moved:

That the Standing Committee be asked to consider the appropriate representation within the synodical structure of an Order of Deacons open to both women and men, and to report to the Synod.<sup>16</sup>

The motion was put and carried.

This decision was important, for it marked the first time that women were accepted in practice as well as in theory as eligible for ordination to one of the orders of the threefold ministry of the Church of England. It also, perhaps, indicated a change in the attitude of the synod towards the ordination of women to the priesthood. For in July 1982 the Report of a Working Group, entitled Women Lawfully Ordained Abroad, was debated. Deaconess D. McClatchey moved:

That this Synod instructs the Standing Committee to introduce legislation based upon Option 5 in the Report Women Lawfully Ordained Abroad (GS 415) to enable women lawfully ordained to the priesthood in other Anglican provinces to be given permission to exercise their ministry on particular occasions during temporary visits to the Provinces of Canterbury and York.<sup>17</sup>

15. The Church of England General Synod Report 1981, p.1101.

16. Ibid., p.1101.

17. The Church of England General Synod Report July 1982.

Deaconess McClatchey referred to the July 1979 synodical debate on the issue, where the motion to recognize in the Church of England women priests ordained elsewhere was defeated by the House of Clergy. However since then the issue had grown. The practice of the Church to "turn a blind eye" to women celebrants was, in view of the media coverage of the issue, no longer feasible. The Presiding Bishop of the Executive Council of the Episcopal Church of the United States had been instructed by a majority vote of members to request the Archbishop of Canterbury to reopen the issue in General Synod. The refusal of the Canadian priest, Reverend L. Clarke Raymond, to celebrate as a priest in Britain until all Canadian priests were so recognized was a striking indication of the potential discord within the Anglican Communion on this subject.

The Bishop of Southwark pointed out that full communion between churches, meant the recognition of each others' ordained ministries. He warned that the Anglican Communion was coming under real strain because of the Church of England's stand on the issue. It was being said by other member churches of the Anglican Communion that the Church of England was making a mockery of full communion. The Bishop feared that the Anglican Communion could not hold together indefinitely under this strain.

The Reverend J.C. Broadhurst remarked that those provinces within the Anglican Communion which ordained women were in

the minority, and it was their action which was disrupting the unity of the Communion, not the Church of England's refusal to recognize their women priests. Furthermore women priests experienced rejection in their own countries as well as in Britain. They were not universally accepted in their own provinces.

After some further debate the motion was put:

	<u>Ayes</u>	<u>Noes</u>
House of Bishops	24	4
House of Clergy	106	68
House of Laity	103	60

The motion was therefore carried. This is a significant result, indicating the gradual shift in attitudes occurring at that time.

In the November 1982 Church of England Synod a report by the Standing Committee, entitled The Ordination of Women to the Diaconate was presented by Mr J.F.M. Smallwood. Mr Smallwood recommended that women and men deacons should henceforward be ordained in identical form. They should both be in Holy Orders. After some debate concerning the report as a whole, the motion was put and carried.

Mr Smallwood then moved:

That this Synod asks the Standing Committee to introduce a draft measure to give effect to such of the recommendations in paragraph 46 as required legislation.<sup>18</sup>

The motion was put and carried in all three houses.

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18. The Church of England General Synod Report November 1982.

In 1981 the General Synod of the Anglican Church in Australia had introduced a bill opening the way for ordination of women to the priesthood. However according to practice this needed the support of three-quarters of the dioceses including all five metropolitan dioceses. A serious setback therefore occurred when in September 1982 both the House of Laity and the House of Clergy in the synod of the Diocese of Adelaide rejected the bill. However the Bishop of Bathurst spoke strongly in favour of the motion in the regional synod of 1984, and the Dean of Sydney indicated his belief that same year that the attitude of the church was gradually changing. The next General Synod would test that hope.

1982 was also the year when the motion, "that the Bishops select and have trained suitable women for ordination to the diaconate"<sup>19</sup>, was passed by the CPSA Provincial Synod (Resolution 10H). The motion was part of an overall resolution to reform the diaconate. It indicated a willingness to implement the principle of admitting women to the diaconate which had been passed in 1979. In view of this resolution, an open letter was sent to the members of synod signed by a number of women members of Synod. The letter asked the members to give further consideration to the ministry of women in the life of the Church. It stated that, "The ministry of women is not something invented by the women's liberation movement of the 20th Century. From the very earliest days of the Christian Church they have sought to fulfill Our Lord's command to go out and make

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19. The Report of the CPSA Provincial Synod 1982, p.42.

disciples ...".<sup>20</sup> The letter cited examples of New Testament women and women throughout church history who worked in response to Christ's call. At the present time,

In our own parishes women minister to the sick, they act as prison chaplains, and are licensed to preach, teach, administer the chalice and sick communions. They lead worship, act as evangelists and catechists and they help in administration in parishes and other bodies. Women do not ask for further opportunities to serve in the Church, for they already serve Jesus Christ in all biblical ways.

Women ask merely that their ministry be formally acknowledged by the Church by being placed within the recognized authority structure of the Church....<sup>21</sup>

The letter pointed out that such official recognition would greatly benefit women and their ministry, especially if the gifts and authority of the diaconate were open to them. Women would receive more encouragement and more acceptance if the church was clearly supporting them, and they would be able to concentrate even more on the life of the church.

In the same year a motion supporting the ordination of women to the priesthood failed at the Swaziland Synod when the laity approved the measure, the clergy were equally divided and the bishop voted against it. Several advocates of the motion spoke of Jesus' open accepting attitude to women, and of Jesus' use of women as the major witnesses of his death and resurrection. Speakers argued that cultural values made women priests unacceptable, but were contradicted by others

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20. "Open Letter to Members of Synod: The Ministry of Women", CPSA Provincial Synod, 1982.

21. Ibid.



who maintained that women could hold positions of leadership in Swazi traditional and contemporary society.

Another group concerned with women's ministry was the Church of England's Advisory Council for the Church's Ministry. It published an occasional paper entitled Women in Training in 1983, investigating the changing situation of women in the professional ministry of the church. It stated that despite the official refusal to ordain women to the priesthood, there were many more opportunities for women both in parochial and specialist ministries than there had been twenty years previously. Nearly all theological colleges had women students and several women staff. The paper stated that in all these areas women were "... helping to demonstrate that professional ministry must be a partnership involving women and men".<sup>22</sup>

However, in many colleges women were beginning to question the content, style and methods of the training they were receiving. Women needed to do theology from their own experience, to regain their hidden church history, and to rediscover the women of the bible as their role-models. In this way women would discover new styles and patterns of ministry and priesthood.

In November 1983 a group of priests of the Church of England, all members of the Movement for the Ordination of Women, set up a similar organization, Priests For Women's Ordination. They had previously resisted such a separate

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22. Church of England's Advisory Council for the Church's Ministry, Occasional Paper No.14, "Women in Training", 1983, p.5.

organization as they wished to avoid a clergy-laity divide. However they realized that they needed to correct the general public's impression that the majority of priests were against the ordination of women. They also needed to organize a group to counteract the strong and vocal minority of priests who were well organized to successfully block legislation concerning women's ordination in the General Synod.

In 1983 the WCC published another study on men and women in relationship, entitled In God's Image. This reiterated a statement at the Nairobi Conference, that the Church's unity included men and women in true mutuality. Many women and men now rejected the passive and restrictive roles formerly assigned to women in the Church, and searched for fuller participation in the life of the Church. The study stated unequivocally that, "The relations of women and men must be shaped by reciprocity and not by subordination. The unity of the Church requires that women be free to live out the gifts which God has given to them and to respond to their calling to share fully in the life and witness of the Church".<sup>23</sup> The 1960s were the time when the churches began to realize their role in perpetuating racism. The 1970s were the time when the churches slowly began to broaden that focus with the realization of their role in perpetuating sexism - the systematic and continuous subordination of women on the grounds of their sex. Feminist theology arose in response to this situation, to provide an analysis of the broken relationships caused by institutionalized male power,

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23. In God's Image, WCC Publication 1983, pp.v-vi.

and to begin to envisage a new community of human wholeness and unity. To achieve this, the recognized group of theologians and New Testament scholars had to include those, such as women, who had previously had little opportunity to interpret God's Word. The exclusively male image of God, too, needed to make use of feminine imagery to include the full humanity of men and women.

The study examined the social and cultural identities of men and women, analyzing the stereotypes and expectations with which each sex was burdened, and identifying the "inferiority" label which attribute seen as feminine were given. It described in some detail the roles assigned to women and the low status, low pay jobs which are the only option for most women.

This situation was largely duplicated in the church, which supported sexual stereotypes and prejudices and gave them religious sanction. Even where secular society was trying to move away from this situation, the churches were reluctant to change and reform. Women still cared for children, served tea, did secretarial work and helped with relief work in the average congregation. Men took the duties of speaking and leadership.

The study concluded that the image of God was often obscured in both men and women due to these roles and prejudices. The people of God needed to re-examine their theological inheritance and ask again the meaning of scripture, for the

actualization of the imago dei was still very far from being achieved either in the world or the churches.

The WCC also held their seventh Assembly in 1983 in Vancouver. A concern expressed there was the need for participation within the churches - participation from laity, women, young people, the disabled and children. Mrs Nicole Fisher spoke on the importance of making the church "a fellowship of participation".<sup>24</sup> Several speakers referred to the question of women's ordination. Ms Liv Nordhaug pointed to the barriers to women's participation in the churches which included not only illiteracy, unjust power structures and discrimination, but also indifference and fear of criticism on the part of those in powerful positions. An inner liberation for both men and women was needed. The final report on this section, Moving Towards Participation, stressed the role played by structures of power both inside and outside the churches in inhibiting women's growth and participation. Their lack of confidence and experience in power politics were an added factor in women's marginalization. Furthermore, tradition, culture and male theology, and biblical interpretation had successfully excluded women from participation in much of church life for the entire history of the church. This was in contradiction to the value Jesus demonstrated for women and to the fact that women were the first witnesses of Jesus' resurrection.

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24. WCC Assembly 1983, Gathered for Life, p.52.

Women, however, were increasingly evolving their own organizations, and networks of these were a hopeful sign of greater participation and an overcoming of the barriers to this. The report recommended that churches must produce clear criteria for the participation of women in their structures. In times of budget cuts, women and youth programmes must not suffer but must receive financial priority. In future team visits 50% of the participants should be women. Churches should provide skills, training and greater opportunities for women's participation, particularly in justice and peace issues. And finally, the ordination of women must be kept firmly on the ecumenical agenda.

The WCC Assembly also concerned itself specifically with the problem of sexism. Under the heading Struggling for Justice and Human Dignity, the Sixth Issue Group defined sexism thus: "Just as any attitude, action or structure that treats people as inferior because of race is racism, so any domination or exclusion based on sex is sexism".<sup>25</sup> The group pointed to the economic exploitation and manipulation produced by sexism, starkly illustrated by the growing sex tourism in some third world countries. The abuse of children added to the seriousness of this situation. Sexism also gave rise to violent crime, particularly rape and assault. The role of the media was pointed to in its encouragement and perpetuation of sexism. The group concluded by emphasizing the role played by the churches in

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25. Ibid., p.53.

supporting and tolerating oppression of many forms, including sexism and racism.

In January 1983, Lucie Okuthe, a deacon since 1980, was ordained priest in Kenya by Dr Henry Okullu, Bishop of Museno South. She is now rector of a new parish, Muhorani. A resolution accepting women's ordination had been passed in 1978 by the Standing Committee of the Provincial Synod, but in November 1982 this was said to have been unconstitutional and, while the principle was commended, demands were made for further discussion before a final decision could be made. Bishop Okullu opposed this step, and stated that it would have created theological problems not to have ordained Mrs Okuthe to the priesthood. It would have been a betrayal of theological convictions to deny her the opportunity to fulfil her vocation.

Also in 1983, Uganda became the second African country to ordain women. On December 11th, three women were ordained to the priesthood in St Peter's Cathedral, Kabale, by the Bishop of Kigezi, the Right Reverend Festo Kivengere.

In Latin America, too, progress was taking place. In July 1984 the Episcopal Church in Brazil voted for women's ordination by twelve votes to one in the Houses of Clergy and Laity. All the bishops present were in favour of the motion. Furthermore, women have recently been ordained to the priesthood in Mexico and Puerto Rico, the churches of which are jurisdictionally linked to the Episcopal Church in the United States.

In August 1984, the Diocesan Synod of Namibia agreed to ask the following year's session of Provincial Synod to proceed with the ordination of women to the priesthood in the CPSA. Proposing the motion the Reverend Shihala Hamupembe said that many commissions had investigated the ordination of women and had found no cultural, intellectual, social or theological reasons why women should not be priests. He stated that the fear that such a move would hinder unity with the Roman Catholic Church was misplaced, as the debate was being pursued at world-wide level, and there were already over 500 women priests in the Anglican Communion.

Mr Alfred Craig said that on the first Pentecost, tongues of fire had touched only men, thus giving leadership in the church to men. Mr E. Hipangelwa opposed this attitude, stating that the time had come for women to take their rightful place in the church. On the final vote only a few people voted against the motion and there were no abstentions.

As a result of the Namibian call, an article in the following issue of Seek, the CPSA's monthly newspaper, called for the bishops to appoint a commission to investigate the question of women's priesthood. The article maintained that there were few arguments against women priests in the CPSA, and predicted that the main opposition would come from the House of Clergy, whilst many bishops and lay people would support the change. The conclusion of the article took a wry note: "It is even possible that the

CPSA's priests will be able to come up with some fresh credible arguments which manage to avoid reinforcing the impression that the real fear is that some women priests might be more competent and dedicated than some men. But don't bet on it".<sup>26</sup>

Also in August the CPSA held a conference on women's issues. As a result of this conference the participants sent an open letter to the CPSA's liturgical committee, asking for a change in sexist language in the rites of the church. Among their illustrations of this request were the following: "people" not "men", "fellowship" not "brotherhood", "neighbour" not "fellowmen", "everyone" not "all men". There is however little evidence that the bulk of the Anglican parishes have taken much notice of this request.

In 1983 and again in 1984 the Church of England General Synod approved measures to ordain women to the diaconate. Nevertheless, the motion had still to be sent to the dioceses and then had to gain a final approval (a two-thirds majority in each synodical house) before it could be implemented. However, 1984 was an historic date for another reason. On November 15th the Synod voted in favour of setting up legislation to enable women to be ordained to the priesthood. This was seen as a great advance, although the motion still had to receive draft legislation, be approved by the dioceses, receive a two-thirds majority in each house of the General Synod and be passed by the Houses of

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26. Seek, September 1984, Vol.24, No.9.



Parliament. The Bishop of Southwark was the one to move the motion:

That this Synod asks the Standing Committee to bring forward legislation to permit the ordination of women to the priesthood in the Provinces of Canterbury and York.<sup>27</sup>

The Bishop argued that the only way to safeguard the doctrine of God in all its fullness was to have both women and men priests. He dismissed the arguments that it was too soon to make such a move, and that such a move would be deeply divisive, and recalled that these same arguments had been used against Wilberforce, who had nevertheless introduced his bill into the House of Commons annually from 1791 to 1799. He went on to point out that there was an increasing number of women priests in the Anglican Communion who could not officiate in Britain, a fact which made a mockery of any claim to full communion within the Anglican family. Finally the Bishop stated categorically the right of Anglicans, in pursuit of truth, to do things of which the Roman Catholic or Orthodox Churches may disapprove.

The chairperson of the House of Laity opposed the motion, speaking of its divisiveness and of the obstacle women priests would present to unity with the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches. However Deaconess McClatchey warned that the continuation of a church run by men with women allowed to participate only in certain small areas would drive more and more young women out of their parishes and into secular groups. 106 members of synod had asked to speak in the 5 hour debate, of whom 24 were called, 8 of these being women.

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27. Church of England General Synod Report November 1984.

The vote tabled a comfortable majority in each house:

	<u>Ayes</u>	<u>Noes</u>	
House of Bishops	41	6	(87%)
House of Clergy	131	98	(57%)
House of Laity	135	79	(63%)

However, this was not yet the two-thirds majority needed for the final vote.

There was immediate reaction to this decision. The Moderator of the Free Church Federal Council welcomed the decision; the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Liverpool described it as "an obstacle to unity".<sup>28</sup> Reverend Geldart, General Secretary of the Church Union, an Anglo-Catholic organization which opposes women's ordination, stated that although they had "lost that battle", they were far from "losing the war". The Bishop of London wrote of the dire consequences likely to occur when a church admitted women to its priesthood, and cited the ECUSA as an example. This provoked firm denials from the Bishop of New York and the Bishop of Newark.

There was a shocked response from a number of people to the Reverend Geldart's statement, asking what the guidance of God had to do with a war, and against whom Reverend Geldart was fighting. But the members of the Church Union were not to be deterred. On August the 14th, 1985, a new alliance of conservative Anglo-Catholics and Church of England evangelicals launched a campaign to prevent the ordination of women to the priesthood. The new alliance named itself

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28. "The Times", November 17, 1984.

the Association for the Apostolic Ministry and a primary purpose of its campaign was to influence the voting for members of the new Synod, due to take place in September and October. The question of women's ordination was likely to occupy a high priority in the life of the coming synod, and the campaign organisers were expecting to prevent the two-thirds majority in each house needed for the ordination of women to the priesthood measure to become church law. Thus the struggle towards women priests in the Church of England was far from over; and was indeed likely to be considerably delayed by groups such as this.

In March 1985 one of the foremost leaders of the CPSA, Bishop Desmond Tutu of Johannesburg illustrated yet again his concern for the rights of all people by supporting the liberation of women.<sup>29</sup> He said that if Christians were serious about liberation they would be concerned about the liberation of women, and declared himself totally in support of the ordination of women to the priesthood. He also called for the use of inclusive language in the church. An attempt to put these beliefs into practice was made at the Provincial Synod in August of that year, when spokespersons from the diocese of Namibia proposed a motion asking synod to agree to the ordination of women to the priesthood, and requesting the Synod of Bishops to set up a further commission to consider ways of implementing this decision. The motion was lost. An amended motion asking the proposed commission to consider the theological and practical implications of the ordination of women to the priesthood

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29. Seek, March 1985.

and episcopate was passed, however, with more than a two-thirds majority.

Another church leader to put himself on the line on this issue was the Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie. The Archbishop said in June 1986, on a visit to Australia, that the movement of the Spirit was towards the ordination of women in the churches. He questioned whether the priesthood could fulfil its true function without women fully participating in it. However Australia was not yet ready for this insight. The General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia, meeting in September 1985, rejected by two votes in the House of Clergy a bill permitting the ordination of women to the priesthood. Nevertheless the same Synod did approve a bill to introduce a canon allowing women to become deacons. And supporters of women priests petitioned the Primate of Australia for a special General Synod to be held in two years' time to debate the issue.

The CPSA was similarly dragging its heels on the question of women priests. At the triennial synod in August 1985, the Diocese of Namibia introduced a motion asking synod to concur with the former's approval of the ordination of women to the priesthood and requesting the Synod of Bishops to set up a further commission to consider ways of implementing the decision. However, the motion was lost. Instead, a motion to set up a commission to examine the implications of the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate was carried by a large majority.

An important event in the debate in the Church of England was its vote in July 1985 to permit women to be ordained deacons, and thus to enter Holy Orders. The voting was strongly favourable:

Bishops	For: 36	Against: 0	Percentage: 100%
Clergy	For: 147	Against: 49	Percentage: 75%
Laity	For: 137	Against: 34	Percentage: 81%

This was the final vote on the measure, which then had to go before Parliament. On October 28 the measure was passed by 303 votes to 25 in the House of Commons, and on November 4 unanimously in the House of Lords.

We bring our survey to an end at this point. It is clear that the world-wide movement in the Anglican Communion towards women priest is slow but inexorable. It is only a matter of time before women priests, celebrating alongside men will be a normal sight in Anglican churches throughout the world. However, this is not yet fully achieved. We move now, therefore, from an assessment of the past, and a glimpse of the future, to an examination of the attitudes and arguments held at present; both those in fear of, and those against, the ordination of women to the priesthood.

## Part II: ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

## PART II: ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

### Chapter 4: A SURVEY OF ATTITUDES AND ARGUMENTS IN THE DEBATE

In this chapter we shall examine the general attitudes expressed against and for the ordination of women to the priesthood, and the arguments, theological and otherwise from which these attitudes are derived. A more detailed exegetical and theological critique and evaluation will follow in subsequent chapters. This chapter is divided into two sections: In Section A we examine the attitudes and arguments against the ordination of women to the priesthood, and in Section B the attitudes and arguments for the ordination of women to the priesthood.

The attitudes quoted in this chapter are drawn from a questionnaire-based survey carried out in early 1986 in the CPSA, in which 700 questionnaires were sent out to the clergy, and 500 to the laity. Of the clergy questionnaires, half were sent to black priests, and half to white priests. The choice of lay parishes was similarly dictated. It was considered useful to identify race in the case of the clergy in order to determine whether this factor had any effect upon the results of the survey. In the case of the laity, however, the difficulties involved in determining ethnicity superceded the value the information could have provided. The questionnaire was very simple in construction (see

Appendix B). It asked firstly if women should be ordained to the priesthood in the CPSA. Optional answers were: now/never/at some suitable date. It then requested reasons for the attitude expressed. And thirdly it enquired as to whether the subject had ever experienced a change in attitude, and the reasons for this change. (Examples of responses received can be found in Appendix A).

The results of the survey are as follows:

Clergy : Total number of responses: 232  
           Black responses               78  
           White responses              154

Response "Never":   Black responses: 25  
                           White responses: 58   Total: 83

Response "Now" :    Black responses: 22  
                           White responses: 42   Total: 64

Response "At some suitable date":  
                           Black responses: 31  
                           White responses: 54   Total: 85

Laity:   Total number of responses: 69

Response "Never"       : 14  
 Response "Now"         : 41  
 Response "At some suitable date": 14

Bishops: Total number of responses: 13

Response "Never"       : 3  
 Response "Now"         : 4  
 Response "At some suitable date": 6

It can be seen that approximately a third of the clergy circulated responded to the questionnaire. Of the responses, just over a third opposed women's ordination to the priesthood. 28% approved of the measure immediately, and the remainder approved of it at some time in the future. It seems likely, from these results, that a two-thirds majority in Synod would be difficult to achieve at this time.



An interesting point to be observed from these data is the attitude of black clergy. A smaller percentage of black responses opposed women priests than the percentage of white responses (Black opposed: 32%; white opposed: 38%). The fact that the percentage of black opposition was lower than that of white opposition will be important when assessing the arguments advanced against the ordination of women to the priesthood.

The response of the laity was disappointingly small. However only 20% of the responses opposed women priests. The large majority of responses favoured the measure. The indications are, therefore, of a two-thirds majority being achieved considerably sooner in the House of Laity than in the House of Clergy.

Of the bishops who responded, only three rejected the measure outright. It is clear, therefore, that it is the clergy who most strongly oppose the entry of women into their ranks.

SECTION A: ATTITUDES AND ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN TO THE PRIESTHOOD.

The attitudes expressed in the survey against women priests can be classified into six categories: those based on (1) subordination passages in the Old and New Testaments; (2) the Christian roles of men and women; (3) the nature of the priesthood; (4) the tradition of the church and ecuminism; (5) practical problems; and (6) prejudice. Examples of each category are listed below:

1. Subordination passages: The subservience of women to men is commanded by scripture, and would be contradicted by the ordination of women to the priesthood.
  - Women are forbidden by scripture to teach men.
  - Women are always under the authority of their husbands, a state which is incompatible with the authority of the priesthood.
2. The Christian roles of men and women: Male and female roles are not interchangeable. The role of headship belongs to the man and not to the woman. However diversity of function does not imply inferiority.
  - Women's divine gift and duty is motherhood. The priesthood would negate the truly feminine attributes and role of women.
  - The roles of men and women are based upon marriage. In marriage man gives the seed, woman receives and nourishes it. The man as seed-giver preaches the Word, and celebrates and administers the Sacraments. The woman is the biblical symbol of the church, the bride of Christ, who receives and nourishes.
  - Leadership and oversight are the responsibilities of men. Women have their own special ministries in the church.
  - Woman's role is in the home.
3. The nature of the priesthood: The priesthood is essentially a male function.
  - Jesus chose only male disciples; the priesthood of the catholic church is thus, by Christian's institution, male.
  - Mary was not given apostleship or priesthood, even although she is the perfection of Christian womanhood.
  - Men only are the image of Christ, who was male. Thus men only can represent Christ as Head and Bridegroom of the church.
  - The priesthood chosen by God, like God and his Son, is male.
  - Women do not have the capacity to receive holy orders.

- The priesthood is a husbandly and fatherly role which cannot be portrayed by a woman.
- 4. The tradition of the church and ecumenism: The tradition excluding women priests has lasted nearly 2 000 years; this is evidence of the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
  - The Anglican church inherits the apostolic succession, as do the Roman Catholic, Old Catholic and Orthodox churches. Women priests would harm the cause of ecumenical progress towards unity with these churches.
  - The Anglican Communion cannot act alone. On a question of such importance a Christian Council is needed.
  - The Christian tradition, along with the Jewish tradition, rejects the pagan institution of priestesses.
- 5. Practical Problems: Men are often apathetic and women taking positions of leadership would enable men to shirk any responsibility.
  - The laity, especially black laity, will not accept women priests. Women do not like other women's authority.
  - Pregnancy and maternity benefits would be costly to the church.
  - If married, women priests would have to move with their husband's career.
  - In the Black culture, women are perpetual minors; men would not accept their leadership.
  - It is a deeply divisive issue.
- 6. Prejudice: The strongest argument against women priests is the kind of women who are offering themselves for ordination.
  - Women are emotionally not suited for the job. Women get too emotionally involved and are too bossy.
  - Women cannot keep secrets in the church.
  - Women are impatient and short-tempered.
  - When women had periods they could not function at the altar.
  - Women are too weak.
  - Women are easily led astray.
  - Women are generally inconsistent.

Having set out a cross-section of the attitudes expressed by opponents of the ordination of women to the priesthood, it is now necessary to examine the arguments used to support these attitudes. These arguments may be classified using the same categories as were used to classify the attitudes above, with the exception of the final two categories.

# 1. Subordination

We turn then to examine the arguments used in opposition to women priests based on the subordination passages of scripture. The texts invariably quoted in this connection are Genesis 2 and the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline texts concerning women.

Genesis 2:7,15,19f is generally regarded as the foundation of the biblical teaching on the subordination of women to men. According to conservative interpretations of this creation narrative, God created the man (ha-adam) first, an intelligent being with power over the earth. The man is also created a moral being, capable of obeying God's commandments (Gen 2:16). Roger Beckwith, an English Anglican of Anglo-Catholic persuasion who has written extensively against the ordination of women to the priesthood, states in an exegesis of this section, that there is at this point already a differentiation between the two sexes. He argues that the command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is addressed,

... in the first instance to the male, the female not having yet been created; and it is the male that the term adam, man, is in this chapter specially appropriated - indeed in verse 20, where 'Adam' is without the article, the term may already be used for a proper name ... It seems, therefore, that the male is depicted here as representative "man" ....<sup>1</sup>

At this point the woman is not yet created. God then created the woman, literally, out of the man.

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1. Roger Beckwith, "The Bearing of Holy Scripture", in Man, Woman and Priesthood, (ed.) Peter Moore, (London: SPCK, 1978), p.48.

Genesis 3 gives an account of the temptation and Fall, with woman being tempted and succumbing first. Having disobeyed God's command herself, she then tempts her husband, who also sins. In God's subsequent allocation of punishment to the serpent, the man and the woman, part of the woman's sentence is as follows,

Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you (Gen 3:16).

These Genesis verses are not generally used in and of themselves as evidence against the ordination of women. Rather they are regarded as a basis for those Pauline texts on women which are regarded by those opposing female ordination as conclusive evidence for their cause.

The first passage from Paul that we shall examine is 1 Corinthians 11:3-16, in which Paul insists on Christian women adhering to the prevailing social custom of wearing a veil in public. This is to demonstrate their honour, virtue and modesty. Both a woman's veil and her hair, are a covering to her; to dispense with either would disgrace her, because she needs them. However to wear such a covering would disgrace a man, who does not need it. This is, according to Paul, because a man is,

the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man, neither was man created for woman, but woman for man (1 Corinthians 11:7-9).

Beckwith exegetes this passage thus:

It should be noted that in this passage the subordination of woman is not argued from her sentence at the Fall, but from the manner of her very creation. In Genesis 2 we read that she was made after the man, from his side, and this leads Paul to say that 'man was not made from woman, but woman from man'. In the same chapter we read that she was made as a helper fit for man, and this

leads Paul to say, 'Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man'. Moreover, the differentiation between the two sexes which we find in the second chapter of Genesis is read back by Paul into the first chapter also, where we learn that male and female were created in the image of God, to rule over the lower creation. Even here, says Paul, there is a difference, for man was created first, in the direct image of God, whereas woman was created later, from man, and so received the image of God indirectly.<sup>2</sup>

This Pauline teaching on women's subordination to men is again stated in 1 Corinthians 11:3, which Beckwith refers to as "the doctrine of the Trinity": "Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God."

Beckwith explains:

Here, the term 'head' denotes 'superior dignity and authority'. Just as, in the family, 'the husband is the head of the wife', who must therefore 'be subject' or 'subordinate' to him (Eph 5:23f), so, in the congregation, the man is the head of the woman, who must similarly be subordinate. She will not, therefore, behave herself immodestly in the congregation in any respect, which certainly means that she will not undertake offices of authority over men. But note that there is nothing degrading in this subordination. If the woman is subordinate to the man, the man is subordinate to Christ which is no degrading relationship, moreover Christ is subordinate to God (the Father), and there is certainly nothing degrading in the internal relationships of the Holy Trinity.<sup>3</sup>

Following 1 Corinthians 11, 1 Corinthians 14:33-36 also refers to women, commanding their submission, and that they be silent in the churches. Here, as in Chapter 11, Paul is insisting on the maintenance of a Jewish-Christian custom. His reference to the Law is interpreted by Beckwith as a reference to Genesis 3:16,

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2. Ibid., p.51.

3. Ibid., p.50.

... which is part of the sentence pronounced on Eve at the Fall and is the Old Testament passage most explicitly teaching female subordination. If so, it is noteworthy that Paul does not consider Eve's sentence to have been abrogated by Christ's redemption ... he holds that female subordination goes back behind the Fall to the Creation itself and extends outside the relationship between husband and wife to the whole relationship between man and woman.<sup>4</sup>

There are several other passages demanding subordination and submission from women, Colossians 3:18:

Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

Ephesians 5:22-4, 33:

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything ... and the wife must respect her husband.

Titus 2:4-5:

train the younger women to ... be subject to their husbands so that no one will malign the word of God.

Each of these passages indicates clearly, it is argued, that women are to remain under the domination of their husbands; their submission a willing response to their husband's love.

The final Pauline message quoted against the ordination of women, and generally regarded as the most decisive, is 1 Tim 2:8-15. This again commands women to be quiet and submissive, and forbids women to teach or have authority over men.

Commenting on this passage, C.G. Blum remarks:

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4. Ibid., pp.53-54.

The command to be silent refers, as a matter of principle, to all spirit-inspired speaking by women in the assembly.<sup>5</sup>

Blum argues that Paul had two reasons for this command. The first was the challenge of gnosticism, in which, Blum suggests, the idea that the two sexes are unequal by creation was being challenged. Blum argues that Paul refutes this challenge, establishing clearly that, "... the circumstances of creation have been transformed sacramentally by Redemption though they are still valid for the concrete ordering of the community".<sup>6</sup>

Beckwith continues this line of thought:

It here becomes explicit that it is the men who are to lead in prayer and that the women must not teach or exercise authority, at any rate in mixed congregations. The principle underlying these regulations is very clearly stated: once again it is the subordination of the woman to the man. The practice of the Jewish synagogue provides a background.<sup>7</sup>

The conclusion reached from these passages by those opposed to the ordination of women is simply that the subordination of women to men stems from creation and thus is not abolished by the coming of Christ; therefore women are unable to hold any position of authority over men. This bars them from the priesthood and the episcopate; however their subordinate position makes them peculiarly eligible for work as "helpers" in the church, a role of service but not of leadership or authority.

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5. Georg Gunter Blum, "The Office of Women in the New Testament", in Why Not? Priesthood and the Ministry of Women, (ed.) M. Bruce and G.E. Duffield, (Marcham Manor Press, 1976), p.68.

6. Ibid., p.70.

7. Beckwith, "The Bearing of Holy Scripture", p.55.



It is clear, therefore, how a fundamentalist interpretation of the above Genesis, Pauline and Deutero-Pauline texts can be seen as strong, even conclusive, evidence against the ordination of women to the priesthood. It is necessary, however, to analyse the actual validity of this interpretation in the light of critical exegesis. This task will be undertaken in the next chapter.

## 2. Roles

The second category of arguments against the ordination of women to the priesthood includes those referring to the Christian roles of men and women in life and in the church. The opponents of women's ordination understand from their reading of Genesis 2 and the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline texts that women were created subordinate to men, and that this dictates their roles in life. A major proponent of the subordination of women and supporter of this view of the biblically-ordered relationship between the sexes is G.E. Duffield, an Anglo-Catholic writer. He explained his views thus:

The biblical principle of hierarchy and subordination is not to be thought of in terms of preserving outmoded male superiority as feminists are apt to assume. It is certainly no cringing servility, but rather an attempt to explain what the Bible means by dependence, and is ultimately true femininity ... The concept of 'equality' of the sexes is in danger of destroying women's femininity, and reducing them to mere substitute males.<sup>8</sup>

Duffield enlarges on this theme with a quotation from Otto Piper:

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8. G.E. Duffield, "Feminism and the Church", in Why Not? Priesthood and the Ministry of Women, (ed.) M. Bruce and G.E. Duffield, (Marcham Manor Press, 1976), pp.20,21,23.

Unless we realize that the relationships of the sexes is determined by God's plan for mankind it must seem objectionable to modern people that the woman is told to 'fear' her husband (Eph 5:33) and to be subject and obedient to him (1 Pet 3:1; 1 Cor 14:34). These demands are not the remnants of an obsolete social order of antiquity but rather derive from the fact that God contrived to redeem mankind by a man rather than by a woman.

Man's superiority is derived from the fact that the woman was created out of man and for him, but not vice versa (1 Cor 11:8f; 1 Tim 2:13). Besides, in Christ's being the Head of the Church, Paul finds a revelation of the true meaning of the sexual relationship (1 Cor 11:3). In other words, the superiority of the man, and thus the subjection of the woman, is a fundamental phenomenon of human life. That this mutual relation should often cause pain and displeasure in married life is not due to man's position of lordship but rather to the fact that sinful men and women are not willing to accord loving consideration to their partner's interest.<sup>9</sup>

What then, is the role of "true femininity"; what are women's biblically prescribed spheres of action? Duffield and Beckwith regard women's main task as supporting their husband's work - this is very suitable to their "helpmate" role in biblical thought. Furthermore, they support spare-time work of lay-women in the church, assisting their priests. Essentially, Beckwith sees the role of women in the church as follows:

According to the Old Testament, the purpose of women's creation was that she should be the married helpmate of man (Gen 2:18-24): thus her vocation is all one with her husband's.<sup>10</sup>

In both the Old and New Testaments, Beckwith believes, the married state is one of great dignity. The woman's role is not, however, one of equality or leadership, but one of loving submission. The same applies to the relationship of

9. Ibid., p.21.

10. Roger T. Beckwith, "The Office of Women in the Church to the Present Day", in Why Not? Priesthood and the Ministry of Women, p.27.

the sexes in the church. Although some of the Pauline strictures, such as those referring to veils and long hair for women, were conditioned by contemporary custom and need no longer be imposed, the general teaching of subordination and submission for women does not change. Thus in our day it is acceptable for women to teach or lead in prayer, but they must not assume an office in which they would constantly do so, "... since this would be to usurp authority over the menfolk in the congregation ... Nor should they have a predominant voice in church government".<sup>11</sup>

V.A. Demant provides another approach in support of the understanding of men's and women's roles in life expressed by Duffield, Piper and Beckwith. Demant understands the two sexes to have inherently different natures and thus inherently different abilities. He argues that a basic part of the Christian faith is the belief that humankind was created as two distinct persons, male and female. They are therefore different and have been given different abilities and gifts. Only to the male, however, has been given the ability to represent Christ in the sacerdotal ministry. A male priest is able to represent both sexes in a way which a woman is not. Women must thus seek to fulfil their own abilities; they must not attempt to become "substitute males". Demant argues that the characteristics of the two sexes are complementary. He outlines these characteristics:

The feminine characteristics are ... concerned with the foundations of life rather than its superstructure; the masculine ones more valuable for theory, conceptual understanding, questioning, generalising ... the difference amounts to the

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11. Ibid., p.37.

notion that endeavour, history, creation and destruction, movement towards a goal, represent the masculine side of existence; and that protection, conservation, renewal by returning to the source, attachment to the particular and concrete, constitute the sphere of feminine aptitudes. Women represent the values of being; man those of becoming and action ... Maleness is associated with law, order, civilization, logos, clock-time and what Freud called the "super-ego". Femaleness is associated with nature, instinct, biological time, feeling, eros, and what Freud called the "id" ... Practical differences arise out of the polarity. Man's creative activity is in the field of politics, economics, organization and equipment. Woman's in the field of bearing, learning, training and managing persons and households ... Women ... have made ... doubtfully good advocates and judges; not really good parliamentarians\* ... Women are constitutionally unsuited to certain kinds of impersonal roles.<sup>12</sup>

Demant argues that women cannot represent Christ, for "... representation is a role men exercise more naturally than women, for it requires a degree of abstraction and generalization foreign to her feminine wisdom. Representation is a masculine idea; so is equality ..."<sup>13</sup>

Demant thus concludes that women are by nature unfitted to be priests:

... men and women on the whole will not value women as representatives; they estimate women in their own personal right ... There are even more cogent practical objections. You could not say of a female ministry so convincingly, 'the unworthiness of the minister does not hinder the validity of the sacrament' ... Members of a female priesthood would always have to be at their best; they would be judged for their personal value entirely ... Women who were priests would be in a position to exercise spiritual jurisdiction over men and this would create a relationship contrary

\* Demant does not seem to have followed Israeli, Indian or South African politics; this was, however, written in Britain before 1979!

12. V.A. Demant, "Why the Christian Priesthood is Male", from Women in Holy Orders, the Report of the Archbishop's Commission, (London: C.I.O., 1966), pp.104-107.
13. Ibid., p.111.

to that which is natural to the life of the household.<sup>14</sup>

Demant maintains that it is in the nature of the priesthood to be composed of male priests only. Women "... have their own kind of ministry giving the peculiar gifts of the feminine sex to the furthering of Christ's work on earth".<sup>15</sup>

### 3. Priesthood

The third category of this section centres on the nature of the priesthood. Opponents to women's ordination often argue that, according to the doctrine of the Incarnation, Jesus was a man, not a woman; Jesus therefore can be represented only by men and not by women. The maleness of the ministry is thus an essential feature of its representative character. In support of this position, E.L. Mascall argues as follows:

... the only ontologically original and ultimate priesthood is that of Christ: it is identical with his status as Son ... (and) subsists in eternity (Hebrews 4:14; 5:5; 6:7). Priesthood belongs to Christ as the Son of the eternal Father. He became man as male, not by accident but because he is Son and not Daughter; because what was to be communicated to the created world in human form in the incarnation was the relation which he has to the Father ... And because the ordained priest is not exercising a priesthood of his own but is the agent and instrument through which Christ is exercising his priesthood, he too must be male ... Christ exercises his priesthood in the church through human beings who possess human nature in the same sexual mode in which he possesses it.<sup>16</sup>

Mascall maintains, however, that women have their own special functions and tasks within a church; not more or less important than those of men, but different. He

14. Ibid., p.111.

15. Ibid., p.111.

16. E.L. Mascall, "Some Basic Considerations", from Man, Woman and Priesthood, (ed.) Peter Moore, (London: SPCK, 1978), pp.22-23.

suggests that more investigation be made into the scope of these functions and tasks, and continues:

And this investigation may well show that the real reason why women cannot receive priesthood is that they do not need it, a reason based in the order of nature before it applies in the order of redemption ...<sup>17</sup>

Louis Bouyer, a Roman Catholic writer, adduces another argument in support of this position. He maintains that

The special public vocation of men in the apostolic ministry was seen as a vocation to represent, among all the members of Christ, the Head, a vocation which, like that of the Head itself, belongs to men only. Similarly, the public vocation of women was understood as a vocation to represent the church as a body, as the Bride of Christ, in its unity as well as in its eschatological integrity. This could be the vocation of women only.<sup>18</sup>

A third argument, originating from Eastern Orthodox theology, is put forward by Kallistos Ware. He believes that the priest is an icon of Christ, and this icon must be man and not woman because Christ was man and not woman. The difference between men and women is very great, according to Ware, and their gifts and functions are complementary and not interchangeable. Since the roles of men and women are not interchangeable, and since Christ was a man, he cannot be represented by a woman. Thomas Hopko articulates the same argument when he states that women's unique mode of human being and action" is incompatible with exercising the presbyteral and episcopal offices.

... the sacramental priesthood of the Christian Church, as the sacramental 'presentation' in and for the Church of Christ himself - the last Adam, the head of his body, the Bridegroom of his bride and the unique high priest, teacher, pastor and

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17. Ibid., p.24.

18. Louis Bouyer, "Christian Priesthood and Women", from Men, Women and Priesthood, *ibid.*, p.65.

bishop of his people - must be exercised only by those members of the church who, by creation and calling, are able to do so, which means in actuality only certain male members of the Church.<sup>19</sup>

A second position in this group of arguments against the ordination of women is the position that Jesus chose only male apostles and, in so doing, set an example for the church to follow. Had he wished, Jesus could have included women among his apostles. The fact that he did not do so is indicative of his wish to limit the apostolic office to the male sex. William Oddie, in support of this view, maintains that,

Jesus, like Paul, regards men and women as spiritually equal; and like Paul too, he maintains the distinctiveness of their roles, and the most enduring part of his 'praxis' is to inaugurate an ecclesial order in which this distinctiveness will be sustained through the centuries.<sup>20</sup>

Kallistos Ware<sup>21</sup> is another to support this position. He argues that Jesus did not say to any woman, "He who hears you, hears me". To no woman did he make the promise to ratify in heaven what she has bound or loosed on earth. To no woman does he give the command to baptize or to preside at the Eucharist. To no woman does he commit his flock. Ware argues that Christians must be obedient to Christ's example in these actions.

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19. Thomas Hopko, "On the Male Character of the Christian Priesthood", from Women and the Priesthood, (ed.) Thomas Hopko, (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1983), p.126.
  20. William Oddie, What will Happen to God?, (London: SPCK, 1978), p.62.
  21. Kallistos Ware, "Man, Women and the Priesthood of Christ", from Women and the Priesthood, (ed.) Thomas Hopko, (New York: St Valdimir's Seminary Press, 1983).

A third argument of this section, closely related to the two arguments above, is the contention that the Christian religion relates to God predominantly as a Father, and only a male can satisfactorily represent this image. The Father image of God is crucial to the Christian understanding of God, and the fact, Peter Moore argues, that "... some theologians ... are seeking not only to play down, but even to eradicate what they regard as false sexism in the tradition of God the Father and the Son ... is not mere speculation, but heresy ..." <sup>22</sup> E.L. Mascall maintains that:

... the Christian priest is to exercise fatherhood and not motherhood to God's family, because his office is a participation in God's own relationship to his people, and God is our Father in heaven and not our mother. The female sex has its own peculiar dignity ... but we can hardly imagine it exercising the Fatherhood of God ... our belief in God would be different from what it is if the Trinity was described as consisting of Mother, Daughter and Spirit .... <sup>23</sup>

William Oddie supports this view, stating "... to ordain women as priests will be to change at its foundations our idea of God". <sup>24</sup>

The Bishop of London, Dr Graham Leonard, argues that the male images we use for God are God-inspired:

The Bible does in fact use quite consistently masculine terms about God: Father, Lord, Shepherd, King. Now I certainly do not take those terms to mean that God is masculine. The fact is, however, that in speaking to us of Himself God has chosen to speak to man, in these terms and not in any others ... It represents, I believe, the fact that in terms of our relationship to God we are essentially feminine and he is masculine to us. In other words that he always has the initiative

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- 22. Peter Moore, "Conclusion", from Man, Woman and Priesthood, *ibid.*, p.166.
  - 23. E.L. Mascall, "Women and the Priesthood of the Church" from Why Not? Priesthood and the Ministry of Women, *ibid.*, pp.111-112.
  - 24. W. Oddie, What Will Happen to God, *ibid.*, p.26.



and our duty is to respond ... I believe that Christ was incarnate as male because I believe psychologically and symbolically and to a large extent biologically, the initiative is seen as male.<sup>25</sup>

Yet another to argue in this way is Hopko:

In his actions in and towards the world of his creation the one God and Father reveals himself primarily and essentially in a 'masculine' way. This is the biblical and liturgical mode of expression which cannot be altered or abandoned without changing and ultimately destroying the revelation itself. The eternal Father of the only-begotten Son becomes, through his Son and in his Holy Spirit, the Father of all human beings made in his divine image and likeness. The Father is said to be 'maternal' in his actions, more tender and loving than the most perfect human mother. Yet he is Father, and not Mother. And his only-begotten Son, (not Daughter) is the bridegroom of the Church, his Spirit-filled bride - the head of his churchly body with whom he becomes 'one flesh' in the Spirit. The Son and Word of God relates to creation (made by, for and in himself) in a masculine, and not a feminine, manner. He is incarnate in human masculine form to embrace and redeem the entire creation, filling all things with all the fullness of divine life to be his beloved body and bride. This is the biblical message, whose language and symbolism have permanent theological, spiritual, mystical and liturgical significance and value.<sup>26</sup>

#### 4. Tradition and Ecumenism

The final area of objection to women's ordination is found in attitudes to tradition and the ecumenical question. Opponents here argue that the tradition of the Christian church has consistently, for nearly two thousand years, excluded women from the sacerdotal ministry. This consistency may be seen as guidance from the Holy Spirit. The demand for women to be admitted to Holy Orders has not arisen until this century. Relatively few women in Christendom are asking for ordination. Furthermore,

25. Graham Leonard, quoted by Christian Howard, The Ordination of Women to the Priesthood: Further Report, (Church House, London: C.I.O. Publishing, 1984), p.84.

26. Ibid., p.84.

... the practically complete absence in the tradition of any positive justification of an exclusively male priesthood is in itself a strong reason for regarding it as an essential element. Justifying arguments often imply suspicion of doubt ... It is therefore quite legitimate to say that the exclusion of women from Holy Orders is ... part ... of the nature of the Christian church ... it is traditional in the sense of incorporating the very essence of an institution a departure from which will make it something entirely other.<sup>27</sup>

The exclusion of women from the sacramental ministry is not of course peculiar to Anglican church tradition but has been shared by all the major denominations, and is still a crucial aspect of many, notably the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches. Both these churches have made this fact clear. Many examples of their position can be given. In the United States, when the Episcopal church was debating the ordination of women in 1973, the Orthodox church there issued this statement:

It is evident that if the Anglican Communion takes the decisive action of admitting women to the priesthood and the episcopate ... it will obviously have a decisively negative effect on the issue of the recognition of Anglican Orders and on the future of Anglican-Orthodox dialogue in general.<sup>28</sup>

In 1975 the Pope sent the following statement to the Archbishop of Canterbury:

We must regretfully recognize that a new course taken by the Anglican Communion in admitting women to the ordained priesthood cannot fail to introduce into this dialogue an element of grave difficulty which those involved will have to take seriously into account ... we have ... often expressed ardent hopes that the Holy Spirit would lead us ... along the path of reconciliation.

27. V.A. Demant, "Why the Christian Priesthood is Male", from Women and Holy Orders, (London, C.I.O., 1966), pp.96-97.
28. Quoted by Robert E. Terwilliger, "A Fractured Church", from Men, Women and Priesthood, *ibid.*, p.143.

This must be the measure of the sadness with which we encounter so grave a new obstacle and threat on that path.<sup>29</sup>

The fact that women's ordination to Holy Orders is obstructing any hope of full communion between the Anglican, Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches is seen by its opponents as alone a sufficient reason to postpone any consideration of women's ordination indefinitely, if not to close the question altogether.

Not only does the issue of women's ordination threaten ecumenical unity; it also threatens the unity of the Anglican Communion itself. The ordination of women to the priesthood in the Episcopal Church of the United States has caused division both within that church and between it and other Provinces of the Anglican Communion. Furthermore, it was arguably the largest single cause for the actual schism which took place in the United States, with the schismatic parishes uniting to form the Anglican Church in North America in 1977. Opponents to women's ordination argue that a decision as fundamental to the nature of the Anglican ministry as the ordination of women should not have been taken and implemented without wide internal agreement within the whole Anglican Communion.

The splits and schisms which have resulted from the action of the Episcopal church could hopefully have been avoided by a greater length of time devoted to consultation and discussions on the issue within the Communion. The over-hasty decision to ordain women has caused great destruction

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29. Quoted by E.L. Mascall, "Some Basic Considerations", *ibid.*, p.13.

to church unity. The result is that in each church within the Communion there is division on this issue. The opponents to women priests in the Episcopal Church summarized their position in a statement affirmed at an informal meeting in December 1976:

We believe that authority in these matters rests in the unbroken witness of Scripture and Tradition. We find that admission of women to the episcopate and priesthood is a change of such magnitude that it would require an ecumenical consensus, as it involves the Doctrine of the Incarnation. Lacking this, we cannot recognize women ordained under authority of the General Convention of 1976 nor their sacramental acts. We must refuse communio in sacris with this new ministry. We wish to continue in fellowship and communion with Anglicans throughout the world, for we believe that the historic Anglican tradition of Evangelical and Catholic truth is worthy of our affirmation, has a claim on our loyalty, and must be restored to its fullness...

We believe that the Evangelical Faith and Catholic Order which the Anglican Communion has received are God given. We solemnly covenant ourselves to uphold this faith and order within the Episcopal Church. We affirm the tradition of male priesthood ordained by the Father in his choice of the sexuality of his Son, the One High Priest, maintained in the appointment of Christ's apostles, and manifest as the mind of the Holy Spirit in the unbroken practice of the church in history. We believe that the ordination of women to the episcopate and priesthood provides no assurance of Apostolic authority for eucharistic consecration, ordination, absolution, and blessing. Therefore, we will not accept the sacramental ministrations of this new ministry.<sup>30</sup>

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30. Quoted by Robert E. Terwilliger, "A Fractured Church", *ibid.*, pp.152-153.

**SECTION B: ATTITUDES AND ARGUMENTS FOR THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN TO THE PRIESTHOOD**

The attitudes of those who expressed themselves in the survey in favour of women priests may be classified in the following categories: those based on (1) the liberation message in the Old and New Testaments; (2) the Christian roles of men and women; (3) the nature of the priesthood; (4) the tradition of the church and ecumenism, and (5) practical questions. These categories thus broadly respond to the categories of arguments put forward by opponents of the ordination of women to the priesthood. Examples of each category are listed below:

1. The liberation message of scripture:- There is no sexual discrimination in Christ (Gal 3:28).
  - Despite some passages, the general attitude in the New Testament is one of acceptance of woman's ministry. To ordain women is the logical conclusion of the New Testament's radical acceptance of women.
  - God created male and female and gave them dominion over the earth. They are equally able to perform the priestly task of bringing God to people and people to God, and of enabling the Church to fulfil its reconciling and redemptive role as the Body of Christ.
  - God's liberation for his children means both political and sexual liberation.
2. The Christian roles of men and women:- The scriptural requirements for the priesthood are found in members of both sexes.
  - All Christians are called to glorify God and his Kingdom, and God calls certain women to do this through the priesthood.
  - All persons are of equal worth before God. Women are therefore worthy to serve God as priests.
  - Men do not have the monopoly of leadership qualities by virtue of having been born male.
  - Women are as strong as men in spiritual matters.
  - Women are not inferior Christians and should not be treated as such.
  - Women experience calls from God. The church must test these calls so as not to be a hindrance to God.
  - If God did not want women to serve him as priests he could not have blessed them with the talents which they possess.
  - Women are heirs of the church and of the Kingdom; men cannot deny them their heirdom.

- God does not respect man-made conventions - he calls whom he wills. The only criterion for the priesthood is God's call.
3. The nature of the priesthood:- Deacons, priests and bishops as representatives of God and of the Body of Christ should be both male and female.
    - Women belong to the priesthood of all believers. The reservation of the ordained priesthood to men arises from purely cultural factors.
    - The ordained ministry needs the ordination of women to make it whole and complete.
    - Women priests would enrich the church's ministry.
    - The Anglican priesthood derives from the New Testament "presbyteros", rather than from the Old Testament understanding of priests, and should not have to comply with the restrictions of the latter.
  4. The tradition of the church and ecumenism:- The tradition of the church has in the past prevented women from responding to God's call. The prejudices of past tradition are untenable today.
    - Fear of ecumenical difficulties with certain churches is not a good reason by which to decide the question of the ordination of women to the priesthood.
    - Ecumenical relations with churches that do ordain women will be improved by the ordination of women in the Anglican church.
  5. Practical questions:- There are no genuine theological or practical reasons for prohibiting the ordination of women to the priesthood.
    - As people see women priests exercising effective ministry their objections and prejudices will disappear.
    - The ordination of women will relieve the shortage of priests.
    - Consensus on the issue of women priests is desirable, but as some will never accept it, it is not a realistic aim.
    - As there are already some hundreds of women priests in the Anglican communion, the argument that ecumenical problems will be created by the ordination of women to the priesthood seems largely academic.
    - Some arguments against the ordination of women seem to be equally valid arguments against their baptism.
    - The ordination of women will help the need for evangelism.
    - In rural areas a number of parishes without priests are served by very competent women. It is an obvious step to ordain these women.

We shall now turn to examine the arguments used to support these attitudes. In doing so we begin the process of critical evaluation, and indicate our own position on the issues. The categories used above will be used to

classify the arguments, with the exception of the final category.

### 1. Liberation

Proponents of the ordination of women to the priesthood argue that there are a number of conflicting messages in scripture concerning the relations between men and women. The teachings of Genesis 2 and the Haustafeln in the New Testament epistles on subordination are counteracted by the message of unity and equality proclaimed by Genesis 1 and Gal 3:28. Of primary importance, however, is the example of Jesus, who treated women as equals, taught and healed them, accepted their ministering to him, and chose them as the first witnesses of his resurrection.

It is argued, therefore, that simply to point to certain selected texts as proof of the subordination of women to men is inadequate. Contradictory texts, the socio-political situations in which the various texts were written, and critical exegesis must all be taken into account. In the following chapter we shall examine both the subordinationist arguments of the opponents of women priests, and the liberation theology of the advocates.

### 2. Roles

Central to the gospel of Christ is the liberation of all believers from sin. Advocates of women's ordination argue that one of the strictures of sin from which we are freed is that of sex-role stereotyping. The rigid allocation of role on the basis of sex as proposed by the opponents of women's ordination, is contrary to the message of the gospel and to the will of God. God's gifts are not dictated by the

sexuality of the recipient. God gives different gifts and abilities to different people, and it is the duty of all Christians to use their divine gifts as fully as possible. The attempts by Demant et al to define certain abilities as exclusively masculine or as exclusively feminine prevent Christians of either sex from fulfilling their God-given potential.

It is necessary to examine the reasons whereby sex-role stereotyping is considered to be sinful. On examining the arguments in Section A of this chapter, it becomes clear that attempts such as those of Duffield, Piper and Demant to define "true femininity" invariably maintain that women's God-ordained place is in submission to men. The ongoing process throughout history in which men have defined women has invariably resulted in a compliant, supportive and non-threatening image of womanhood. It has also resulted in women being defined as inferior to men. Submission and inferiority have been inseparable in theology in the past, and this situation remains the same today. This can easily be demonstrated by an examination of Demant's argument.

Demant's list of "feminine" and "masculine" characteristics and his description of the two sets of characteristics as a "polarity", has overwhelming parallels with earlier descriptions of sexually-based characteristics, also described in terms of a polarity. These are the descriptions of the so-called "Church Fathers". Of these, the most fundamental was the description of the mind-soul as "male", and the body as "female". Men were thus regarded as active, powerful, achievers; women were passive, weak and



incapable of constructive thought and action. Women were seen as the passive recipients of the male seed, subservient, ignorant and concerned with trivialities. Women were of the flesh, whilst men were of the spirit. Thomas Aquinas believed, for example, that women were primarily created for reproductive purposes, although even in this sphere women constituted the passive and material principle, while men constituted the active, and thus more excellent principle.<sup>31</sup> These beliefs have clear echoes in the polarities described by Demant; although Demant couches his theories in considerably less blatantly and offensively prejudiced terms than did the "fathers". Nevertheless, the female for Demant is associated with nature, instinct, eros, the id - in other words, with the flesh, the body. Maleness, on the other hand, is associated with law and order, civilization, logos - in other words, the mind-soul. Women are associated with the values of being, with conservation and with attachment to the concrete - in other words, with passivity and trivialities. Men, of course, are associated with understanding, questioning, creation and achievement. The correlation between Demant's thinking and that of past churchmen is most strong.

On the basis of their understanding of the polarity of male and female attributes, the church "fathers", and many other theologians throughout Christian history, had no hesitation in labelling women inferior to men. So convinced was Augustine of women's inferiority, that he wondered at the biblical description of woman as helpmate to man, arguing

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31. Markus Barth, Ephesians 4-6, (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1974), p.705.

that women were created solely for the generation of children.<sup>32</sup>

Unlike the "fathers", Demant, Beckwith et al, do not claim that women are inferior to men. They claim that women are equal, but "different". It is interesting to note, however, that the same "feminine" characteristics which were associated with women as "inferior" in earlier centuries are now associated with women as "different". Moreover, the same Pauline and Genesis texts quoted above are still quoted today as the basis for this "difference" and its resultant role-definition for women.

E.L. McLaughlin argues that "different" is simply a more acceptable word for "inferior". She states,

This 'difference' between the sexes ... has historically, in fact, been inseparable from inferiority. Separate has meant functionally unequal. More to the point for Christians, separate and different have meant that a woman is not free to say 'yes' to God's will in her life, for the church has defined the way in which God may validly speak to women!<sup>33</sup>

But why has "different" meant "inferior" in the Christian tradition? Elizabeth Carroll argues that women's inferiority has stemmed from the submissive role dictated to her by the dominant male. The headship of the male in the Christian tradition has been misused. Men have used their power as domination. In such a situation,

Power becomes the enforcement of the will of the dominant person or group upon the subordinate. Role, character and virtue of the subordinate are defined by the dominant in order that the

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32. Ibid., p.705.

33. Eleanor I. McLaughlin, "Male and Female in Christian Tradition", from Male and Female: Christian Approaches to Sexuality, (ed.) Ruth T. Barnhouse and Urban T. Holmes III, (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), p.42.

subordinate may serve the ends of the dominant. Domination, in other words, prevents self-definition.<sup>34</sup>

Women have been excluded from all power structures and dominated in all areas, even that of domestic life. To justify these structures of dominance, an ideology of female "difference", and therefore of male superiority, has been maintained in the church. Human qualities regarded as more valuable have been seen to be male; less valuable, and even despised, qualities have been seen as female. Ida Raming points out that women have been downgraded in the church throughout history, and still experience this now. But it is more subtly done now. Whereas in the middle ages the inferiority of women was based on biblical demands for submission and on Aristotelian biology, nowadays the status of women is seen as an expression of their otherness, the "fact" that they are different from men. Raming argues that,

Nothing can blind those who think critically, those who have learnt from the history of theology and the Church, to the fact that in the last resort all such reasoning is based on the premise of the inferiority of women and their resultant subordinate status.<sup>35</sup>

The fundamental question to be asked, then, is whether women and men do, in fact, possess different and peculiarly feminine and masculine characteristics and attributes, and whether these are best understood in terms of a polarity.

34. Elizabeth Carroll, "Can Male Domination Be Overcome?", from Concilium: Women in a Men's Church, (ed.) Virgil Elizando and Norbert Greinacher, (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), pp.45-46.
35. Ida Raming, "From the Freedom of the Gospel to a Petrified Men's Church: The Rise and Development of Male Domination of the Church", from Concilium: Women in a Men's Church, (ed.) Elizando and Greinacher, p.11.

In answering this, the nature/nurture question promptly arises. To what extent can characteristics be said to be innate, and to what extent are they due to social conditioning? Feminists will argue that men have occupied the dominant position in society for many centuries and have defined and moulded women as best suited male interests. For this reason it is difficult to discern which characteristics, if any, are innately feminine and which have been imposed upon women as being of inferior value and thus not suited to the male self-image. There is no omega point from which one may determine conclusively whether or not there exist any peculiarly feminine or masculine qualities. However the presence of modern women successfully participating across the spectrum of social activities clearly contradicts a rigid polarity model of human abilities. Women function successfully in many areas previously barred to them. It seems clear, therefore, that polarity models of human characteristics exist not to reflect the truth of human nature but to achieve a male monopoly of desirable characteristics and activities.

We therefore would suggest that the understanding of human characteristics and abilities in terms of a polarity of masculine and feminine is both outdated and inaccurate. In contradiction to Demant's claim that "feminine" characteristics are not suited to certain professions, the twentieth century has witnessed the successful participation by women in spheres of activity previously defined as "masculine". Women have proved themselves to possess as wide a range of characteristics and abilities as men. Instead of a polarity model, then, the understanding of

human characteristics in terms of a spectrum may be more accurate. Women and men both possess varying characteristics in varying degrees, with natural and social factors both playing a part in determining the eventual make-up of the individual.

The argument supporting women's ordination, therefore, is that women and men do not possess different sets of characteristics, but that all share to varying degrees in all those characteristics constitutive of human nature. Those women who possess an overall character suitable to the priesthood, and who feel themselves to be called by God to that task, should have their vocation tested in the same way as do male applicants.

The above argument points to several biblical passages for its confirmation. The most important of these is the parable of the talents (Mt 25:14-30). This teaches that those who have received various abilities must use and multiply their abilities, and they will be punished if they do not do so. There is thus a strong obligation upon those who have received the gifts and the vocation for the priesthood to fulfil these talents. Those who prevent them from doing so are going against the will of God. Romans 12:4-8 and 1 Cor 12 give a similar message. Both passages emphasize that each person's gifts are from the Spirit. It is not possible to suppose that the Spirit of God, moving far beyond the understanding of the human mind, is nonetheless completely predictable in the allocation of gifts and talents to each person, and acts in this allocation entirely on the basis of each person's gender.

The Spirit of God knows no constraints, and the human character is far more complex than simplistic as understanding allows.

The argument against the ordination of women to the priesthood, based on the supposition that women do not possess the necessary characteristics for priesthood, thus falls away. However, one characteristic remains a question. Is masculinity itself a necessary condition for priesthood? This question brings us to the third area of theological difference: the priesthood.

### 3. Priesthood

It is the basic contention of those who favour the ordination of women to the priesthood that men and women are both able, and are in fact both necessary, to represent Christ to the church and the church to Christ. In response to those who maintain that only men may represent Christ, there are a number of points that can be made. Firstly, there is the basic confusion of representation with impersonation. In Christian doctrine the priest does not impersonate Christ, the priest represents Christ. And for the task of representing Christ in celebrating the sacraments of our redemption both men and women are equally fit, for both men and women are equally redeemed. Furthermore, in John 1:14 we are told not that the Word became male, or man, but that the word became flesh. It is the humanity not the masculinity of God which is the critical point of the Incarnation; the humanity which both men and women equally share. Moreover, the Greek words "anthropos" and "aner" are both translated "man", although

"human" would be a better translation of "anthropos".

Barnhouse and Holmes argue on this point:

Neither in scripture nor in the original Greek of the creeds formulated in the first few centuries, which have been in continuous use since that time, is the word 'aner' used in connection with the Incarnation. The word used is always the generic term 'anthropos', or else 'sarx' which means 'flesh'.<sup>36</sup>

We may add that the priest does not represent the dead Jesus, but the risen Christ, in whom sex has no significance whatever. The assumption of human nature and the sacrifice of himself for the sins of mankind were the essential elements in Christ's mission. Christ is the mediator between women and God as he is the mediator between men and God, otherwise women are clearly not redeemed. But if Christ is the mediator between women and God then why can this mediation not be represented by a woman? To reserve the priesthood to men it must first be demonstrated conclusively that of all the effects of redemption, one has been exclusively reserved for men. The gospels on the contrary stress the universality of Christ's saving action. We note further that the question has been asked as to why it appears that the only exclusive criterion for priesthood is the male sex. Ruether observes that,

Since this strange new version of the imitation of Christ does not exclude a Negro, a Chinese or a Dutchman from representing a first century Jew, or a wealthy prelate from representing a carpenter's son, or sinners from representing the Saviour, we must assume that this imitation of Christ has now been reduced to one element, namely male sex.<sup>37</sup>

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36. Male and Female: Christian Approaches to Sexuality, (ed.) Ruth T. Barnhouse and Urban T. Holmes III, (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), p.226.
37. Rosemary Radford Ruether, To Change the World, (London: S.C.M., 1981), p.46.

To turn to Mascall's argument in particular, the assertion that Christ is "Son and not Daughter" raises most profound problems of attributing to the pre-existent Christ not only human nature but sexually differentiated human nature as well. Furthermore, John and Gillian Muddiman point out that Mascall's biblical evidence for the unique priesthood of Christ is found only in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and furthermore that his interpretation of Hebrews is dubious. They argue that,

... the priesthood of Christ is not, in Hebrews, 'identical with his status as Son'. As priest, he does not 'communicate to the world the relation he has with the Father' - such a formulation owes more to the theologies of Paul and John, from which the metaphor of priesthood is absent - rather his priestly role is to effect an all-sufficient sacrifice for sin and to reopen access to God ...<sup>38</sup>

The Muddiman's conclude that the masculinity of the human Jesus has no relevance to his priestly role in Hebrews, and there is little analogy between that unique priesthood, and the later Christian presbyterate..

Mascall's conclusion that women have their own special functions and do not need priestly ordination due to their natural position can simply be responded to by the fact that such an argument is based on the polarity model of male and female attributes, a model which has little basis in the Gospels, considerable contradiction in the Epistles, and is not borne out in modern experience.

Louis Bouyer's argument against the ordination of women is based on the man being the head of the woman. This headship

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38. John and Gillian Muddiman, Women, the Bible and the Priesthood, (Published by the Movement for the Ordination of Women, London, 1984), p.9.



similarly receives no support from the Gospels, and is reached through a process of exegesis which is hotly debated by scholars, from passages in the Epistles which, according to a majority of scholars, are heavily influenced by the culture and socio-political situation in which they were written. It cannot, therefore, simply be assumed that male headship is ordained by God. Jesus never affirmed this principle, and its appearance in Scripture is almost certainly due to the social, political and religious influences which so strongly supported the concept in the Jewish, Hellenistic and Roman world-views of the time.

The argument that the priest is the icon of Christ, implying some sort of external similarity between Christ and the celebrant, is advanced by Ware and Hopko. But they do not explain why the common possession of human nature is insufficient for such similarity, or why maleness is essential when racial descent, age, circumcision, beard and length of hair are not.

Carroll Stuhlmueeller makes a further point:

The priest represents Christ because he represents the Church ... There is no Liturgical prayer, and in particular there is no eucharist which is not the action of the church.

For this reason, she concludes, the fact that women do not have a "natural resemblance" to Jesus the man is irrelevant.

... since on the level of sign the representation of Christ is grounded in representation of the church it would seem that a woman could perform

the priestly role of representing Christ as well as a man.<sup>39</sup>

Professor Richard Norris points out that if Christ can only be represented by a male, then it must be not merely as a male, but partly in virtue of the fact that he was a male that Christ is God-with-us. This Christological premise assumes "... not merely that Jesus was a male, but that male, as distinct from female, character was and is a necessary precondition of Christ's being what he is ...".<sup>40</sup> This is clearly absurd; women are baptized into Christ and share the identity of Jesus Christ; they can therefore represent Christ.

Another point to be made with regard to the priesthood, is that both Christ and the Church are in fact better represented by the priesthood of both men and women than by the priesthood of men alone. Both men and women are created in the image of God; thus Christ as God-with-us is best represented by the partnership of men and women expressing the partnership of the Trinity. And, of course, the church, deriving at least half of its membership from the female sex, is far better represented by both sexes than by just men.

A second, or related, argument is that both men and women are equally redeemed by Christ; thus both are equally able to represent that redemption in the celebration of the Eucharist. To reserve the priesthood to men it must first be demonstrated conclusively that of all the results of

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39. Carroll Stuhlmueller, quoted by Christian Howard, The Ordination of Women to the Priesthood: Further Report, (Church House, London, C.I.O. Publishing, 1984), p.86.

40. Ibid., p.87.

redemption, one has never been available to women. The New Testament in contradiction to this stresses again and again the universality of Christ's saving action.

We turn now to another argument put forward by opponents to women's ordination which states that as Jesus called only men to be his disciples, he clearly intended that only men would carry out the apostolic succession as priests and bishops.

In response to this argument it may be pointed out, first of all, that there has been considerable debate, much of it inconclusive, over the question whether Jesus intended to inaugurate an ecclesial order or not. Certainly there is no evidence that Jesus had in mind the male only threefold order of ministry which developed later. Moreover, Jesus never instructed any woman as to her role; and his insistence on Mary of Bethany's right to "the better part", as well as his continuous insistence on hearing the Word of God and doing it as taking precedence over all other roles, even those of family duty and motherhood, indicates that he adhered to no rigid gender role-allocation structures at all. Furthermore, Jesus called no Gentiles to be his apostles. To no uncircumcized man did he commit his flock as only Jews were present at the Last Supper. Does this mean that Jesus' clear intention was that all priests in the church today should be recruited from the ranks of circumcized Jews?

John and Gillian Muddiman observe, in reference to the Twelve, that,

... there was a special reason, applying solely to the original Twelve, for this preference for men. Apparently they were to symbolize the reconstruction of Israel in the last days, as twelve new patriarchs or twelve new elders like those appointed to assist Moses (cf Mt 19:28). The choice of men, therefore for this unique eschatological and symbolic function was dictated by the Old Testament parallels.<sup>41</sup>

The Muddimans further make the point that the argument of the maleness of the apostles to the maleness of the priesthood is an argument from analogy, and since the analogy is by no means complete, it is a tenuous foundation on which to base the claim that Jesus intended an all-male priesthood.

Another point to be considered is Ware's claim that Jesus gave the command to celebrate the Eucharist only to men. This clearly presupposes that only men were present at the Last Supper. However, there is no clear evidence for that - it was, after all, the women's task at that time to prepare and serve meals. Also, it was passover, and Hays van der Meer maintains that women were present at this feast.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, there is the inescapable point that if Jesus said "Do this in memory of me" to men only, this refers to the entire Eucharist, including the eating and drinking of his body and blood. Thus, on this argument, Jesus invited only men to participate at Communion.

Furthermore, the argument from Jesus' action in choosing his disciples overlooks one crucial fact: Jesus' revelation did not end with his ascension. He promised, and sent the

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41. John and Gillian Muddiman, Women, the Bible and the Priesthood, (London: Published by the Movement for the Ordination of Women, 1984), pp.11-12.

42. Hays van der Meer, S.J., Women Priests in the Catholic Church?, p.14.

Spirit to continue his presence here on earth. For this reason, the analogy of the spread of ecclesial power and authority from Jewish to Gentile Christians must be observed. Although Jesus commissioned only Jewish apostles, and spoke of being sent to the lost sheep of Israel, the early church, with the guidance of Christ's Spirit, quickly grew to include Gentiles and to share apostleship with them. In the same way, the Spirit may now be calling Christians - and the Spirit may have been calling for a long time - to recognize and ordain women to the apostleship and the priesthood of Christ's church. In doing this, the church would be acting in accordance with Jesus' action when he appeared to Mary Magdalen and made her the first witness of the resurrection and then commissioned and sent her, as his apostle, to witness to others about this supreme event.

The arguments, then, which base their opposition to women priests on Jesus' masculinity, the masculinity of the Twelve, and the predominance of male images of God, are all untenable. Jesus was incarnated a human being. To argue that God could only have been incarnated in male form necessarily presupposes the inherent masculinity of the Godhead, which is clearly absurd. But if it is Jesus' humanity, not his masculinity, which is the fundamental event of the incarnation, then the human Jesus, and the resurrected Christ, can be represented equally well by either sex. Similarly, male images of God are not more representative of the nature and being of God than female images, and to argue that God "chooses" male images over female images simply ignores all the cultural influences which operated in favour of male images during the centuries.

in which the Old and New Testaments were written. Finally, the calling of twelve male disciples does not create the logical imperative of an all-male priesthood. There is no evidence that Jesus envisaged a church and a priesthood as they exist today. Indeed, Jesus sent a number of apostles to witness to him, several of whom were women.

A further argument in favour of the priesthood of women maintains that the ministry of Word and the ministry of Sacrament are one and indivisible. G.W.H. Lampe argues that,

The theology and practice of the liturgical movement in every part of the church has been centred upon the indissoluble link between the word and the sacraments ... These two modes of God's address to us are theologically inseparable and as far as possible they should be united liturgically ... in both these modes Christ the Word is made present to us as the bread of life.<sup>43</sup>

Lampe points out that women have been formally entrusted for some time now with the ministry of the word in the Anglican Communion. Deaconesses and women Readers preach on a regular basis in the churches. Thus the New Testament passages that forbid women to teach and even to speak in church are in practice set aside as no longer relevant to present-day Christianity. Yet although women may minister the word, they are not permitted to minister the sacraments. In the ministry of women the unity of word and sacrament is thus destroyed. And even the ministry of the word itself is divided by the church's refusal to admit women to priestly

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43. G.W.H. Lampe, "Word Without Sacrament - A Lop-sided Ministry", from Women Priests? Yes, Now!, (ed.) Canon Harold Wilson, (Surrey: Denholm House Press, 1975), pp.11-12.

ordination, for women may not exercise the ministry of absolution. Lampe concludes:

No man is compelled to content himself with what the church is increasingly coming to regard as an incomplete, indeed a maimed, ministry. Yet this is precisely what every woman minister is in fact compelled to do, for no other reason than that she is a woman. In her case the dichotomy between the ministry of the word and the ministry of the sacraments is absolute; and this is an intolerable theological, liturgical and pastoral anomaly.<sup>44</sup>

Arising out of Lampe's argument is the question: why is it that denominations which have tended to place their main emphasis on the ministry of the Word rather than the ministry of the sacraments, have on the whole little problem in ordaining women; whilst those denominations which place their main emphasis on the ministry of the sacraments have been strenuous in their refusals to admit women to the priesthood? Part of the answer to this question lies in the fact that the latter denominations have inherited the long tradition in Israel of consistently excluding women from any area of religious leadership. The low value placed upon women in Jewish religion is illustrated by the fact that they were not even allowed into the central court of the temple in Jerusalem. There were no women rabbis in synagogue Judaism, and, of course, no women priests in the temple worship. Instead, women suffered certain restrictions in the degree to which they were permitted to participate in worship.

It is doubtful if we shall ever know all the reasons for this situation. The Goddess worship in many of the communities surrounding that of the Jews is often understood

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44. Ibid., p.18.

to be one reason. Priestesses in the fertility religions were very influential and the role of priestess must, therefore, have been associated with these idolatrous religions which Yahweh hated. The sacred prostitutes of the fertility religions must have been an added horror to the Jewish religion, which severely punished women engaging in extramarital and premarital sex as a threat to the patriarchal inheritance system. Another suggested reason for women's exclusion from the priestly role is menstruation. The rigid purity laws of the priesthood regarded the defilement of a priest as punishable by death, and the emission of blood was a deep defilement to all women, as was childbirth. And perhaps the most significant contributory factor to the tight control exercised over women in general was the continuing need to retain group identity and unity. In a patriarchal society where women were considered in the light of possessions, it was essential to preserve them from the attractions of alien cultures. The belief in the "uncleanness" of women took root in Christianity, and in 668 the Bishop of Canterbury, Theodore of Tarsus, laid down the rule that women during the time of their menstruation should neither enter a church nor communicate. This rule applied to both nuns and laity, and quickly extended to the Continent. Jerome and Augustine both upheld this rule, which obtained for many centuries. As late as 1684 women were being refused entry to any church during their monthly periods; they were told to remain at the door of the church.<sup>45</sup>

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45. Joan Morris, Against Nature and God, (London and Oxford, Mowbrays, 1973), pp.110-111.



Although such discrimination has now been abolished, the fact is that it is the Greek Orthodox, Old Catholic, Roman Catholic and "high" Anglican churches, all of which place great emphasis on the importance of the sacraments, maintain complex rituals in the celebration of the sacraments, restrain the laity from approaching the altar too closely by means of the altar-rail, and use the Old Testament term "priest" rather than the New Testament term "minister", that are most fierce in their opposition to women priests. The possibility that fears of ritual impurity still linger in the unconscious tradition of these churches is difficult to deny.

Exclusion of women from the ordained priesthood may thus simply be a continuation of priestly practices of the past. The holiness concentrated in the Temple was understood to require cultic purity. Yet Jesus rejected all cultic criteria for purity, expounding the concepts of clean and unclean in terms of moral and ethical life.

In short, then, there appear to be no valid reasons why a woman, created in the image and likeness of God, should not represent God in the sacrament of priesthood. If a woman experiences a calling from God to the priesthood, she should be on an equal footing with her male colleagues, be permitted to have her vocation tested by the church and, if accepted, be ordained a priest of the Anglican Communion. Her femininity is no bar to the sacerdotal ministry.

#### 4. Tradition and Ecumenism

The argument from tradition against women's ordination is, of course, entirely dependent upon whether or not the exclusion of women from Holy Orders was and is the will of God in the first place. As we have seen, most biblical justification of a male ministry is based on Paul, who in turn bases his arguments on a rabbinic interpretation of Genesis 2. But there appear to be no reasons other than social and cultural influences, why Paul and/or those who wrote in his name chose to base their theology on this interpretation of Genesis 2 rather than on Genesis 1. Furthermore, prominent scholars are deeply divided on the correct interpretation of the New Testament texts concerning women. None advocate a literal interpretation, and all point to cultural, social, economic and political influences at work at the time the texts were written. Since many of the exegetical tools used by modern scholars in their study of the New Testament are recently developed, it is impossible to rely uncritically on past interpretations as embodied in church tradition.

In addition to these points, it must be observed that the traditional understanding and implementation of female submission and male headship have not always had the happiest consequences. The contempt for and devaluation of women expressed in many of the writings of the church "fathers" embodies a misogynism in the Christian tradition which found extreme expression in the torture and murder of millions of women during the centuries of the witchhunts. In our own century the tradition was used as a reason for

opposing the access of women to education, to participation in public, professional and political life, and even to the use of painkillers in childbirth. Thus the concept of a great, unbroken, and glorious tradition, whilst undeniably emotionally attractive, simply does not reflect accurately the realities of church history and tradition. A more critical look at the tradition, its biblical basis, and its historical outworkings is essential for any serious theologian at this time in church history.

In reference to Demant's comments quoted earlier, it is not in fact accurate to claim a "practically complete absence ... of any positive justification of an exclusively male priesthood ..." as proof that male priesthood is an unquestionable and immutable law. Epiphanius discussed the question, claiming that from eternity onward only men had occupied the priestly office. Tertullian asked whether virgins, as opposed to other women, could hold sacerdotal office; and concluded most definitely that they could not. Ambrosiaster, Irenaeus, and Augustine all upheld the belief that males only could be priests.<sup>46</sup> Church laws echoed these sentiments.

In C.E. 343, the Council of Laodicea declared that in future, women could not be appointed elders (presbyterae) in the Christian church. Myrtle Langley observes that by this time presbyters had in effect become cultic priests, with sacramental functions considered to be inappropriate for

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46. Haye van der Meer, S.J., Women Priests in the Catholic Church?, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1970), pp.48-57.

women.<sup>47</sup> However, the issue did not disappear, despite this law. Thomas Aquinas discussed the question, concluding that Christ had to assume a male sexuality, because the masculine sex was more nearly perfect and strong, and because the roles of the Redeemer, as doctor, pastor and defender, were incompatible with the subordinate status of the woman. In the same way the duties of a priest were also incompatible with the subordination of the female sex.<sup>48</sup> Yet another to discuss the question of the male priesthood was Dominic Soto (1494-1560), who maintained that women could not receive ordination due to their poverty of reason and softness of mind.<sup>49</sup>

Thus throughout a considerable period of time it can be seen that there were in fact a number of justifying arguments for an all-male priesthood; arguments which, as Demant himself says, "often imply suspicion of doubt". These arguments, which comprise and support the tradition on this subject, do not appear to share the same understanding of women, or indeed the same understanding of priesthood, as are widely accepted in the church today. Thus a question mark is raised against the tradition as being an authoritative ground on which to base an argument against the ordination of women to the priesthood.

Turning to the ecumenical argument against women's priesthood, there are several points to be made. Firstly,

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47. Myrtle Langley, Equal Women, (Basingstoke, Hants, U.K.: Marshalls Paperbacks, 1983), p.62.

48. Eleanor Comino McLaughlin, "Equality of Souls, Inequality of Sexes: Women in Medieval Theology", from Religion and Sexism, (ed.) Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1974), p.220.

49. Mary Daly, The Church and the Second Sex, (London: Godfrey Chapman Ltd., 1968), p.59.

and most importantly, the member churches of the Anglican Communion should surely not be deflected from carrying out what they believe to be the will of God because of opposition from other denominations. In response to this, the rejoinder is often made, that neither the member churches individually, nor the Communion itself, have managed to reach consensus on this issue, and thus it would be better to delay an action until consensus is reached. Action without consensus only creates division. Some take this argument further, demanding consensus not only within the Anglican Communion, but amongst all the churches in Christendom, before action can be taken on women's ordination. All of this overlooks an essential fact. The question of the ordination of women to the priesthood is not in itself the cause of division. The cause is found in the wide divergence of opinion on the questions underlying the issue of women's ordination: biblical hermeneutics; understandings of the role of the priesthood; the imagery used to describe God; and the nature and place of men and women in creation. Until consensus is reached on these issues, there cannot be consensus on any issue dependent upon them. And it must be honestly asked if it is really possible for such consensus to be reached, even within the Anglican Communion, at least within a very long period of time.

It is the extreme unlikelihood of such consensus being reached in the short-term which leads to the suspicion that a call for consensus before proceeding with the ordination of women is a delaying tactic. Christian Howard asks, on

this head, whether consensus in fact requires change to proceed at the pace of the slowest mover. She quotes the Anglican-Reformed Conversations:

Those opposed to the ordination of women argue that the force of nineteen centuries of tradition should not lightly be set aside; and that a decision on such an issue should not have been taken by one denomination on its own, but only by a universal Council of all the Churches. All those concerned for Christian unity will take this argument seriously, so long as it is not simply a device to block all discussion and change. How long is it right to expect those in favour of the ordination of women to wait, bearing in mind that there has not been a universally recognised General Council for a thousand years?<sup>50</sup>

A second point to be made with reference to the ecumenical argument is the fact that very many of the Reformed Churches already ordain women and have been doing so for some time. Thus, although women in the ministry may create an obstacle to union with the Orthodox, Old Catholic, and Roman Catholic churches, it would in fact function in reverse to this with the Reformed Churches, bringing unity closer. This fact is mostly ignored by proponents of the ecumenical argument against the ordination of women.

It must finally be asked whether the ordination of women to the priesthood in some member churches of the Anglican Communion has in fact created such enormous obstacles to unity with the Orthodox, Old Catholic and Roman Catholic churches. Despite the fact that there are now over six hundred women priests in the Anglican Communion, dialogue on reconciliation between these churches has not ceased. And both the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox churches have made tentative expressions of hope. The Elucidation of the

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50. Christian Howard, The Ordination of Women to the Priesthood: Further Report, *ibid.*, pp.71-72.

Statement on Ministry and Ordination, from the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, published in 1979, states:

In those churches of the Anglican Communion where canonical ordinations of women have taken place, the bishops concerned believe that their action implies no departure from the traditional doctrine of the ordained ministry (as expounded, for instance, in the Statement). While the Commission realizes that the ordination of women has created for the Roman Catholic Church a new and grave obstacle to the reconciliation of our communions ..., it believes that the principles upon which its doctrinal agreement rests are not affected by such ordinations; for it was concerned with the origin and nature of the ordained ministry, and not with the question who can or cannot be ordained. Objections, however substantial, to the ordination of women are of a different kind from objections raised in the past against the validity of Anglican Orders in General.<sup>51</sup>

And parts of the Roman Catholic Church have gone further than this. Alla Bozarth-Campbell quotes from the "Statement on the Ordination of Women", by the Anglican-Roman Catholic Consultation in the United States:

... (The ecumenical) process of mutual consultation ... must not interfere with the interacting roles of prophecy and authority within either Church. The entire body of the faithful is in the same Spirit, distributing diverse gifts at will, at times manifests itself to the entire body through the prophetic witness of a few, for the sake of the whole.<sup>52</sup>

With regard to the Orthodox Church, ACC 4 states:

Undoubtedly the ordination of women in some Anglican Churches has deeply shaken the confidence of the Orthodox in the seriousness of Anglican resolve towards unity with them ... But the measure of their shock is also the measure of their affection. In spite of the seriousness of this difficulty we hope that Anglican-Orthodox relations may increase in significance in the future ...<sup>53</sup>

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51. Ibid., p.47.

52. Alla Bozarth-Campbell, Womanpriest, (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), p.121.

53. Ibid., p.48.

Furthermore, there are vast areas within the Anglican-Orthodox dialogue which have not yet been discussed in detail, as the 1984 Anglican Orthodox Joint Doctrinal Commission observes:

We have failed to reach agreement concerning the possibility, or otherwise, of the ordination of women to the priesthood ... There are, however, many related issues that we have not so far examined in any detail, particularly the following: How we are to understand the distinction within humanity between man and woman; what is meant by sacramental priesthood ...; what, apart from the sacramental priesthood, are the other forms of ministry within the Church.<sup>54</sup>

It must be observed that these areas still to be examined include many of the problems underlying the question of ordination of women to the priesthood. Thus there is a great deal of discussion still to take place before the issue of women priests can be effectively debated. To wait for this point to be reached could, therefore, take many decades. Discussion between the churches will inevitably continue for a very long period of time, whether the Anglican Churches ordain women now or whether they wait.

In view of this length of time needed before anything like consensus in Christendom can be reached, perhaps another approach to the question of ecumenical progress can be considered. This is the approach of Archbishop Scott, formerly Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, who wrote:

If we are prepared to act but also to recognize that our action must be tested by experience and if we are prepared to have other churches help us to evaluate the results of the action, then we may, in fact, be making a contribution to wider ecumenical relationships. We may be helping the

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54. Ibid., p.49.



whole Church to reflect at a deeper level. Whether our action turns out this way or not will depend in part on the attitude with which we move ahead. If we move ahead arrogantly, implying that those who disagree with our action are wrong, the action will not help ecumenical relationships. If we move ahead with conviction, but with humility and with a willingness to have the results of our action carefully evaluated, then a real contribution to ecumenical relationships may well result.<sup>55</sup>

This approach, to proceed with dialogue and in humility along the path to which each church believes God is calling its members, seems the wisest solution to the problem of inter-and intra-denominational dispute on the question of the ordination of women to the priesthood.

Finally, in response to the claim that the divisions within the individual churches and within the Communion, and the schism in the United States, are clear pointers to the probability that the ordination of women is not the will of God, there are two points to be made. The first is that it is not the issue of ordination of women itself which is divisive; there are wide divergencies of opinion and faith on the areas underlying this issue. The issue of the ordination of women has only served to uncover these divergencies; they might well have been uncovered by other contentious issues anyway. Secondly it must be pointed out that divisiveness is not necessarily evidence that the Spirit of God is absent. Jesus himself was at times divisive; he acknowledged this in Mt 10:34. Paul did not wait for a general consensus of the Apostles before he embarked upon his mission to the Gentiles; he received his divine call and carried it out. Divisiveness may well mean

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55. Ibid., p.72.

that the Spirit of God is commanding a certain action in the face of opposition from worldly forces and interests. But if the action is of God, it will prevail.

The arguments for and against the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate reveal clearly the wide areas of theological difference existing in Anglican, and indeed in Christian thinking. These differences rest, to a large extent, upon differences in biblical interpretation and hermeneutics. It is thus necessary to examine more closely the biblical texts upon which these divergent attitudes are based, and it is to this task that we turn in our next chapter.

## Chapter 5: BIBLICAL TEXTS MUSTERED IN OPPOSITION

### A: THE CREATION NARRATIVES

The Hebrew Bible presents several creation accounts. Historical-critical scholarship has discovered that Genesis 1:1-2,4a and 2:4b-24 belong to two different sources, the first generally recognized as Yahwist and the second as Priestly.<sup>1</sup> This discovery is most important, for it establishes that ancient Israel used different descriptions of creation at different times. Reflection on creation could thus vary quite significantly. In the older account, for example, God formed humanity from clay and a rib; in the later account creation was by God's word.

Literary-critical study has also established that the biblical texts had a long oral tradition of which they were the final stage. Thus the two accounts in Genesis were shaped gradually by a long line of thinkers and teachers. These people created myth, expressions of their understanding of existence in relation to the creator and source of that existence and meaning. The creation narratives repeatedly made the creation, and humanity's relationship to the creator, present in the community.

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1. The latter, J, is derived from the Yahwist and is earlier in origin, from the tenth to the ninth centuries BCE. The former, P, is from the Priestly code, and is later, from the sixth to the fifth centuries BCE.

Claus Westermann describes it thus "...in the Creation narratives of the Bible the history of mankind is preserved as a whole, as a continuum, as a meaningful continuity in such a way as to preserve for the early man's understanding of reality - that is, of existence and of the world.<sup>2</sup>

Turning to Genesis 1:26, it is immediately clear that it has a different concern from Genesis 2. Genesis 2 tells how the human creation event occurred. But Genesis 1 leaves the details of how humanity was created very much in the background. Emphasis here is on what was created and for what purpose. The concern lies with what humanity is, and its close relationship with God and with the earth. Westermann sees here signs of development of reserve with regard to the process of human creation. There is an intent within the priestly account to maintain awe towards God's act of creation, an acknowledgment that this act is not accessible to the human mind.

Genesis 1 gives humanity a special place in creation - humanity is the image and likeness of God, possessing dominion over the earth. The author states twice that male and female are made in the image of God. Humans are creatures of God - this creatureliness determines the meaning of their existence. God also gave the blessing of fertility to humanity, and humanity shares this blessing with the animals, which the Creator likewise called 'very good'. Fertility, often seen as the 'animal' part of existence, is clearly stated to be a blessing, although it has often been undervalued, together with an undervaluing of

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2. Claus Westermann, Creation, trans. J.J. Scullion from Schöpfung, 1971, (London: SPCK, 1974), p.13.

women. Far from being 'carnally sinful' it is strongly affirmed by God as good.

The creation of humanity in God's image is the creation of creatures who respond to God, to whom God can speak and who can answer. Humanity is created so that something can happen between God and humanity. Creator and creatures communicate and relate to each other. Westermann points out that the noun 'man' in the creation narrative is a collective one. Creation in the image of God is not of an individual, but of humankind. Humanity exists in community.<sup>3</sup>

However, for most of history, the 'man' whom God created has been understood as an individual, and much debate has taken place as to what special quality has been given this creature as the image and likeness of God. Surmises varied with historical ideologies, illustrating again and again that biblical interpretation is inevitably time-conditioned. Irenaeus distinguished between a natural and supernatural image and likeness. Philo saw the image and likeness in humanity's spiritual capabilities. Augustine defined the concept as consisting of the powers of the soul, memory, intellect and love.

Closer to our time, theologians believed the image and likeness to lie in religious-moral personal life; or in free will, self-consciousness and intelligence. It has also been postulated that the image and likeness was a literal one - the external form of humanity. Recently, the idea has

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3. Ibid., p.160.

evolved that the image and likeness lies within the whole of human existence, and among all of humankind, primarily in the relationship with God. This, Westermann believes, is closer to the biblical message. There is also another dimension to God's creation of humanity in his own image and likeness. God, the ruler of all creation, delegates part of his sovereignty to humanity in giving it dominion over all the earth. Thus humanity stands in a position of responsibility before God. Men and Women are called to, and are capable of, a personal relationship with God.

Humanity is described in Genesis 1 as having been created as a unity which includes male and female. The difference between the sexes is a deep part of the good creative purposes of God, and essential need of female and male for each other is made very clear in both Genesis 1 and 2. Together they form the humanity which God created. Genesis 1 is a completely egalitarian description of human creation. The priestly writer describes God as creating humanity immediately in its dual sexual form. In this account there is no priority or inferiority of either sex expressed or implied.

Genesis 2 provides a rather different account of creation to Genesis 1, largely because it has different concerns. Whilst the priestly account simply states the creation of humanity as male and female, the Yahwist takes the division of humanity into two sexes and makes it an object of critical reflection. Thus in the story, 'ha-adam', literally 'the human', is created and given an occupation. But this was not enough. It is not good for the human to be

alone. Solitary existence does not fully express complete humanity. For the Yahwist, only in community are humans fully human. What is characteristic of being human could not be found in single existence. It seems clear that in this passage the awareness of the meaning and value of community life is expressed. God then creates animals and brings them to the human. But they are not enough for full community, because they are not the same as the human being; they are not bone and flesh of the human. Leonard Swidler points out that they are not equal to the human and, to be fully human, there must be relationship between equals.<sup>4</sup> God, therefore creates the sexes, equal though not identical, out of ha-adam.

The term 'ha-adam', 'the human', is used in Genesis 2 all the way to verse 23, where the differentiation into man, or ish and woman, or ishah, takes place. Swidler states that, "Up to that point it is very clear that the creature out of which woman is fashioned is hadam, generic, undifferentiated humanity".<sup>5</sup> However, in verse 23 the phrase "ishah was taken from ish" occurs, and here the possibility of confusion arises. Swidler argues that a play on words is being used, with the writer indicating that the word ishah is derived from the word ish (although modern grammarians have suggested that ish is not in fact the derivation of ishah).<sup>6</sup> But from this play on words, the conclusion arose that the woman was derived from the man and not from humanity, although the Hebrew ha-adam contradicts this.

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4. Leonard Swidler, Biblical Affirmations of Woman, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1979), p.77.

5. Ibid., p.77.

6. Ibid., p.77.

Thus the NIV translation of this section is somewhat inadequate.

Swidler provides a more accurate translation:

21 So the Lord God made humanity (ha-adam) fall into a deep sleep ... 22 God built the rib he had taken from humanity (ha-adam) into a woman (ishah) and presented her to humanity (ha-adam). Humanity (ha-adam) exclaimed: 23 This at last is bone from my bones, and flesh from my flesh! This is to be called woman (ishah), for this was taken from man (ish).

In the final verse, the play on words, in fact, does appear to indicate the derivation of ishah from ish in contradiction to verse 22. It is, therefore, necessary to examine more closely the play on words used by the Yahwist.

In 2:7 humanity (ha-adam) is formed from the earth (ha-adamah). In verse 23, ishah is taken from ish. In both instances the close relationship and interdependence between the two is being stressed. There is no suggestion, however, that humanity is derived from the earth or that woman is derived from man. In both instances they are derived solely from God. Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:7-9 and the Deutero-Pauline writer of 1 Timothy 2:13 failed to grasp this point. Both the latter state that the woman is derived from the man and is, therefore, subordinated to the man. We argue with Swidler that this is not a feasible interpretation of the text. Ha-adam is taken from ha-adamah, yet no suggestion of humanity's subordination to the earth is ever made. On the contrary, humanity is given dominion over the earth, so that humanity becomes superior to that from which it is taken. By strict analogy, then, ishah, being taken from



ish, indicates, if anything, woman's superiority over man. But this practice of extrapolating from the text more than it says is very misleading. The text states that humanity was created by God and then differentiated by God into woman and man. The relationship of this couple is one of mutuality and equality, not of female subordination. Neither woman nor man are autonomous creatures; they are necessary for each other's full humanity.

Another mistaken extrapolation from the text made in the New Testament is a claim of male superiority because the male was incorrectly understood to have been created before the woman. This is based on the assumption that the superior was created first. However, Genesis 1 and the use of ha-adam in Genesis 2:1-23 contradicts this. From this argument one must assume that the earth is superior to humanity, an assumption never made by the exponents of woman's inferiority. This extrapolation too distorts the message of the Yahwist, who states that God fashioned ha-adam (not ish) from the dust of the earth. The Yahwist does not speak of the prior creation of male humanity.

A third attempt to establish the inferiority of woman is through reference to a "helper" in 2:18. Apart from the fact that ha-adam refers to humanity and not to the man, "helper" here does not mean a work assistant or help in begetting posterity, as Augustine believed. The Hebrew term Ezer neged carries no implications of inferiority. The term neged indicates equality meaning literally "alongside of", and the term is, in fact, predominantly used in the Old Testament to describe God, as in Psalms 33:20, 115:9-11,

121:2, 124:8, 146:5-6, Exodus 18:4 and Deuteronomy 33:7, 26 and 29. Thus the implication of female inferiority read into this verse needs to be corrected. The verse is a description of mutual and equal co-operation, partnership and human community. 2:24 reinforces the strength of the need man and woman have for community together. The author is explaining the basic power of love between man and woman. Even the strongest bonds, the bonds to family and home, must break in the face of this love.

Genesis 3 describes humanity's offence against God. This story begins with God's command to humanity not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It is important to note here that had the reading of the text which believed the man to be created first, before the woman, been correct, it would have been to the man alone that this command was given, as the woman had not yet been created. She could not, therefore, have known the command, as she indicates that she does in 3:3, and she would not have been guilty of disobedience.

The Fall describes the introduction of sin, evil and misery into the world. God is affirmed to be good; it is humanity who is responsible for sin. Gravest of all the consequences of this sin is alienation from God. Here the tragedy of the fall is underlined. God had hitherto been the loving focus and source of humanity's life. Now the man and the woman hide from God. But God calls them to responsibility. They had freedom and they misused it. God questions them and they each attempt to lay the blame upon another; the man upon the woman and the woman upon the serpent. But the

serpent is not questioned, although the origin of the situation. The real cause of what happened is thus never clarified. The origin of evil cannot be properly explained.<sup>7</sup>

God then curses the serpent, and curses the ground. God does not curse the woman and the man; he describes to them the state of alienation from himself that they will, in future, experience. God's pronouncements of punishment describe what it means for humanity to be driven out of the presence of God. These verses are not eternally valid norms laid down for the future, but descriptions of the limitations and sufferings of men and women in the world. Claus Westermann and Robert Davidson both argue that these verses were written to explain the experience of humanity, not to prescribe it.<sup>8</sup> The pronouncements of punishment on the woman describe the lot of woman's life as it was experienced and understood at that time. The same can be said of the man. Although alleviations for childbirth and machinery for farming have made these two aspects of human life easier, the broad message of the text has remained the same over many centuries and is still so today. Childbirth, the domination of women by men, work to grow food or earn an income, and death and burial are ever-present realities. The legal equality of man and woman in Western societies today still does not negate the physiological differences between men and women, nor does it negate the prejudices felt by men and internalized by women. All of these still

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7. Nevertheless, women have always been blamed by the church for causing the sin of the world.

8. Claus Westermann, Creation; Robert Davidson, Genesis, (Cambridge U.P., 1979).

continue to produce social effects which are extremely detrimental to women. The deepest of human relationships, the true union of a man and woman, thus continues to be perverted.

As far as the relationship of men and women is concerned then, Genesis 1 and 2 make it clear that God created them in perfect relationship, as equals and partners. The Yahwist does not say that the domination of woman by man is according to God's good creation. It is because of humanity's disobedience that all creation becomes disordered and all relationships perverted. These things are evil, resulting from sin, and against God's will.

One of the traditional interpretations of the fall, as typified in both Corinthians and 1 Peter, is to see in it proof of woman's inferiority to man. The argument is that the serpent approached the woman to tempt her because she was weaker and less intelligent. Tertullian is only one of the many to express this approach: "The sentence of God on this sex of years lives on even in our times and so it is necessary that the guilt should live on, also. You are the one who plucked the fruit of the forbidden tree, you are the first who deserted the divine law, you are the one who persuaded he whom the Devil was not strong enough to attack. All too easily you destroyed the image of God, man".<sup>9</sup>

This is a sexist line of thought, it is also self-contradictory. The assumption is that the serpent could only tempt the woman, as she was of lesser intelligence than the man. But, if this assumption is carried over to the fact that the woman successfully tempted the man, one is forced to the conclusion that the woman must be of superior intelligence to the man! This is a logically unavoidable

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9. Quoted in Haye van der Meer, S.J., Women Priests in the Catholic Church?, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1973), p.54.

conclusion, yet it was never reached. The reason why the Yahwist describes the serpent as speaking to the woman rather than the man cannot be known. To suggest that women are more easily led astray might have been understandable in an age when women were refused education and were kept secluded in the home; but, if this suggestion is made today, it is revealing only the prejudice of the speaker.

Leonard Swidler has recently put forward an interesting theory. The worship of deity as a goddess was the target of intense hostility by the patriarchal leaders loyal to Yahweh. Therefore it is interesting to note that a very prominent symbol of a powerful contemporary goddess was the serpent. Furthermore, this serpent goddess was believed to be the source of wisdom and knowledge - and priestesses were the mediators of this goddess. Underlying this religious structure lay a sociological structure which, Swidler suggests, was very possibly matriarchal. Verse 24, where the man leaves his parents for marriage, not the woman as was usual in male dominated societies, is suggestive of this. It was thus also possibly matrilineal. So, to obtain power and property, the men in the society needed to change the theology of a supreme goddess as the source of wisdom, with women as her mediators.

If Swidler's thesis is correct, then in Genesis 2 it is shown that the goddess, in her symbolic form of the serpent, claims to reveal to humanity true knowledge and participation in divine life, a claim which is spurious and leads to death. Furthermore, it is through a woman that the serpent makes this destructive and evil claim. Hence, men

should not follow the mediatorship of women to gain wisdom, and the goddess should be discarded as a distorter of wisdom, making room for Yahweh worship. Finally, women are to have desire for their husbands, who will rule them. This, Swidler believes, is a clear attempt to establish monogamy, at least with regard to the wife, so that property could be placed in the hands of men and the matrilineal system abolished. Only with the woman's sexual activity limited to her husband, could the father be known and patrilineal inheritance established.<sup>10</sup>

We conclude from our study of Genesis 1 and 2 that there is no evidence that God regards women as inferior to men, or that God proclaimed an eternally valid command for women to be subordinate to men. God created men and women as equal partners in his original creation. After the sin of humanity in disobeying God, God described to the woman and the man the sad consequences of their disobedience, and drove them from the Garden. The description of the evils women and men experience in life were reflective of the Yahwist's own period of history. Whilst in their overall message they are still true today, aspects such as painful childbearing and painful toil in farming have been greatly ameliorated in many cultures, and few believe this amelioration of suffering to be against the will of God.<sup>11</sup>

God does not will the suffering he describes in Genesis 2. The creation narratives are descriptions not prescriptions.

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10. Swidler, Biblical Affirmations of Women, p.84.

11. Although there were a number of clerics and laymen earlier this century who spoke against the use of newly-discovered painkillers in childbirth, believing this to be contrary to God's will as expressed in Genesis 2.

Suffering is described as an evil consequence of sin and, in due course Christians believe, God sent his Son into the world to redeem humanity from sin and its consequences. The understanding of Genesis 2 to reveal the secondary nature of women is thus, according to our analysis, far from reflective of God's intention at creation. Rather it is reflective of the desires of the men of that society to obtain exclusive rights to power, possessions and privilege. As Swidler observes,

Thus did theology serve to reflect, justify and confirm the 'new' patriarchal, patrilineal social structure.<sup>12</sup>

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12. Swidler, Biblical Affirmations of Women, p.84.

## B: THE GOSPELS AND ACTS

The New Testament evidence cited against the ordination of women, as mentioned in the previous chapter, is mainly drawn from the Epistles, but there are several Gospel passages which are relevant too, and we shall turn to these first. The passages describing the calling of the Twelve Disciples are of particular importance, because of the fact that the Twelve were all men. Mt 4:18, 9:9, 10:1-41; Mk 1:16-20; 2:14; 3:13-18; Lk 5:10; 5:27; 6:12-16; Jn 1:35-49; all describe and name the disciples, and make it clear that Jesus, for his first particular followers, chose only men. This is held by opponents of women priests to be clear evidence that Jesus intended only men to serve him as priests.

The problem with this argument is that the Twelve, chosen, it is universally agreed, to represent the twelve tribes of Israel, were not the clear forerunners of to-day's priesthood. Although they served an especial symbolic role and were very close to Jesus, they were not the only disciples of Jesus; the gospels refer to many other of Jesus' followers as 'disciples' (Jn 6:66). Jesus had many disciples, including a number of women who travelled with him - Luke mentions Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and many others (Lk 8:24). Prominent among Jesus' disciples must also be numbered Mary and Martha of Bethany (Jn 11:20-32; Lk 10:42). The Twelve were especially commissioned by Jesus to witness to him, but Jesus asked others to witness also, including the woman with the issue



of blood (Lk 8:47), the woman at the well (Jn 4:39) and, above all, Mary Magdalene as the first witness of Jesus' resurrection. Moreover, although Jesus first sent out the Twelve to witness to him (Lk 8:1-6), he later also sent out the Seventy-Two (Lk 10:1-17) and there is at least a *prima facie* possibility that among the Seventy-Two were some of his women disciples.

Acts 2 state that on the day of Pentecost the disciples "were all together in one place". It is not clear whether "they" refers to the Twelve only, or to the group of about 120 believers described in Act 1:16, of which both the Twelve and the women were a part. However, it is most unlikely that "all" refers merely to the Twelve, and not to a larger group of people, a group which would certainly have included the women. This hypothesis is strengthened by the fact that Peter, guided by the Spirit he had just received, quoted the prophet Joel:

"I will pour out my Spirit on all people  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy..."  
(Joel 2)

The inclusive language used here indicates clearly that women as well as men could, and in our view certainly did, receive the Spirit at Pentecost.

In any case the Twelve could not have been the only followers of Christ to receive the Spirit. All must have received it and have witnessed to their faith. Certainly the Twelve were not the only apostles. Barnabas is called an apostle in Acts 14:4,14. James, the brother of Jesus, appears to be given the title in Gal 1:19, 2:9. Paul also laid claim to this title, and in Rom 16:7 speaks of

Adronicus and Junias as "outstanding among the apostles". Incidentally, it is by no means clear that Junias was a man. The name at that time was far more widely used for women than for men; thus there is a fairly strong probability that Junias, like Mary Magdalene, was a woman apostle. It is only the male-oriented bias of biblical commentators that has found it so difficult to believe that the Spirit could send women as well as men to witness to Jesus; to be apostles, "those sent".

Unlike the clergy today, the Twelve were not the rulers of the church. The Twelve did not appoint the seven overseers (Acts 16:5); the whole community did this. The Twelve, although part of the Jerusalem Council, shared its power with a large number of elders (Acts 15). Most significantly, the sacraments were not the exclusive function of the apostles; others besides the Twelve, for example, baptized new converts (1 Cor 1:14).

The New Testament makes it clear that the essential qualification of an apostle is the divine call, the commissioning by Christ. The apostolic witnesses of the New Testament, including both women and the Twelve, experienced the incarnate and risen Christ, and received the Spirit from Christ in order to build up the community and create the Church. The apostolic office of the Twelve was primarily a foundational office. The church is built upon the fruits of that office.<sup>13</sup>

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13. The apostolic succession of the episcopate does not negate this argument, as it is based not only upon the Twelve, but also upon later apostles such as Paul and Timothy, and, we may add, Junias, Mary Magdalene, Phoebe, and other women.

There are other reasons for questioning the existence of the Twelve as evidence against the priesthood of women. The Twelve were all men, all Jews, all from Palestine. They were all from humble origins and none were highly educated. Of these characteristics of the Twelve, only the masculine characteristic has been regarded as normative in the church. Yet the Jewish characteristic might be regarded as just as important as the sexual one. The reason why only one characteristic of the Twelve is regarded as normative has never been adequately explained.

However, although the argument that the Twelve were all men, therefore the priesthood must be all-male, is neither scripturally nor logically imperative, its refutations are not imperative either. We do not know whether Jesus ever envisaged the priesthood as it exists today, let alone whether he would have placed sexual restrictions upon it. The arguments and counter-arguments based upon the Twelve are inconclusive.

## C: THE CORINTHIAN TEXTS

The bulk of evidence referred to by the opponents to the ordination of women to the priesthood in the Anglican Communion is found in the Pauline, Deutero-Pauline and Pastoral Epistles. This evidence is regarded as primary rather than circumstantial, as it deals directly with womens' place in creation and in the church. The first text in this category is 1 Corinthians 11:2-16.

### 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

Opponents of womens' priesthood understand "head" (Kephale) in verse 3 to imply authority. They argue that, as "the head of the woman is man", women cannot hold a leadership position in the church which would put them in authority over men. Women are commanded by God to occupy a "helpmate" position in creation, whilst men are intended to lead and hold authority. Thus, only men can be priests.

C.K. Barrett, however, does not understand the term "head" in quite the same way. He states that, "In Greek usage, the word, when metaphorical, may apply to the outstanding and determining part of a whole, but also to origin ....".<sup>14</sup> Barrett argues that "origin" as the correct understanding of "head" in this instance is strongly suggested by verses 8f. Here Paul does not say that man is lord (kyrios) of woman; he says that man is the origin of

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14. C.K. Barrett, 1 Corinthians, 2nd ed. (London: A & C Black, 1971), p.248.

woman. In this he is dependent upon Genesis 2:18-23, where it is stated that woman was created from Adam's rib, to provide a helper for him. Barrett points out that Paul may have reached a different conclusion had he started from Genesis 1:17, where male and female were created, equally, at the same time. Paul may have been influenced by this verse in his statement that woman is the glory of man does not include the claim that woman is the image of man. Woman and man share equally the image of God and woman is not, Barrett emphasises, more remote from God than is man.

However, Barrett does conclude that

There can be no doubt that Paul taught a form (we may call it an innocent form) of subordinationism .... The Son would no longer be the kind of Son we know him to be if he ceased to be obedient to and dependent on the Father ... Thus a claim of originating and subordinating relationships is set up: God, Christ, man, woman. From this proposition, practical consequences are deduced.<sup>15</sup>

Barrett suggests a comparison of this relationship between men and women with 1 Corinthians 7:3-4 where an exact parallelism of conjugal rights is drawn up. In these verses Paul asserts equal and reciprocal rights for both wife and husband. If the husband has authority over his wife, she has equal authority over him. Barrett states that this striking equality must be borne in mind when other Pauline texts dealing with men and women are examined.

Hans Conzelmann understands the term "head" in verse 3 rather differently. He argues that the concept of headship is derived from Hellenistic Judaism, and means the subordination of woman to man.<sup>16</sup> This is challenged by F.F.

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15. Ibid., p.249.

16. Hans Conzelmann, 1 Corinthians, trans. James W. Leitch,

Bruce, however, who agrees with Barrett in translating "head" as "source" or "origin".<sup>17</sup> Bruce likewise with Barrett discerns in verse 3 a clear hierarchy in the order of creation. He does not, however, suggest that the hierarchical relationships imply subordination.

Jean Héring understands the primary emphasis of verse 3 to be on the submission of a woman to her husband. Man is the head of the woman, although not in the same sense as Christ is the head of the man. According to Héring, Paul feels a need to prove two theses: the inferiority of woman, and the necessity of woman's subordination to man. Héring remarks: "Both are in line with Judaism, but we shall have to enquire how the Apostle reconciles his contention with statements like Galatians 3:28".<sup>18</sup>

W.F. Orr and J.A. Walther follow Barrett's interpretation that the fundamental proposition in verse 3 is that there is a hierarchy of spiritual subordination. In verse 5 Paul makes a clear assumption that woman will offer public prayer and make public prophecy. Barrett points out that Paul does not question this situation; he merely regulates the way in which it will take place. Héring agrees with this, stating that for both men and women it is their dress in religious meetings which is under discussion.

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(ed.), George W. MacRae, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p.185.

17. F.F. Bruce, 1 and 2 Corinthians, (ed.) (and Commentary) by F.F. Bruce, (New Century Bible), (London: Olifants, 1971).

18. Jean Héring, The First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians, (London: Epworth Press, 1952), p.102.

Considering women's wearing of a head-covering or veil in verse 5, Barrett states that it is necessary to ask whether or not Paul is here simply dependent upon custom. He concludes that it is probably not the case; Paul claims that nature expects a woman to be covered, so that for her to be uncovered is an unnatural act. If this is so, then even in communities where it is not considered disgraceful for a woman to be bareheaded, the Pauline injunction regarding head covering does not lose its force. Barrett then turns to verses 7 and 8. Verse 7 is taken from Genesis 1; verse 8 from Genesis 2. In these verses, the man is described as the image and glory of God, whilst the woman is seen as being derived from the man and intended as his helper. This is her role in creation. However, verse 11 indicates that in Christ the situation is changed. Barrett claims that being a helper to man is not a woman's role in Christ "... in whom such distinctions are removed ..."19 Nevertheless, Christians remain within the created order and Paul is trying to accommodate to that situation.

Hans Conzelmann provides further insights into verses 4-9. He points out that in Judaism the head, and more particularly the face, constitutes in a special way the image relationship with God. This is why the man is commanded not to cover his head. By being instructed to wear a head-covering, the woman is here being indirectly excluded from being the image of God; she is at most only God's image in a derivative sense, through the man. Conzelmann states that, "It is not unintentionally that

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19. Barrett, 1 Corinthians, p.253.

Paul, in the case of the woman, speaks only of doxa and not also of eikon ... "This cannot be derived from Genesis 1:26 either - quite the contrary! Once again, the Jewish presupposition becomes visible".<sup>20</sup> Like Héring, Conzelmann points out the discrepancy between these verses and Galatians 3:28.

F.F. Bruce understands women's head-covering very differently from Conzelman. Denying that the veil in any way implies woman's subordination, he argues that " ... it is a sign of her authority ... In Christ she received equality of status with men: she might pray or prophesy at meetings of the church, and her veil was a sign of this new authority".<sup>21</sup> Bruce states that neither man nor woman has higher dignity than the other before God, but as Christians living in the period when the two ages overlap, the Corinthians were instructed as far as possible to respect the ordinances of both, "giving no offence" (1 Cor 10:32). He argues that being a Christian at that time was very difficult and it was foolish to give the society proof of depravity by departing from social conventions.

A more traditional interpretation is provided by Jean Héring. He understands verses 6-9 to indicate clearly that the woman, being taken from the man, is inferior to him.<sup>22</sup> She was created because of man, and the purpose of her

20. Hans Conzelmann, 1 Corinthians, p.186.

21. F.F. Bruce, 1 and 2 Corinthians, p.106.

22. Jean Héring, The First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians, pp.105-6.



existence is not in herself, but in being a helper to him. Woman was created by God only indirectly, and is in some degree further removed than man from the Creator. Woman is thus inferior to man, and a bareheaded woman challenges her husband's superiority and dishonours him by wishing to be his equal.

Such a subordinationist understanding of anthropology is explained by W.F. Orr and J.A. Walther as being due to Paul's reading of the Genesis creation stories. They remark that, "His reading of that material, however, is somewhat selective. He relies heavily upon an interpretation of the J story in Gen 2:21- 33, from which he concludes that the original order of creation makes woman's creation secondary to that of man ... His reading of the Scripture is unfortunately conditioned by the male orientation of his thought world ... The "image of God" language is from the story in Genesis 1; Genesis 2 says nothing about this".<sup>23</sup> Orr and Walther observe that there is no statement in either story that the woman is the glory of the man; they assume that this was inferred by a combination of Gen 1:27 with the rib story. They conclude that "If Paul had not already had traditional beliefs about the relationship, it is doubtful that he would have reached the conclusions he did from the Genesis texts."<sup>24</sup>

23. W.F. Orr and J.A. Walther, 1 Corinthians, (Garden City, New

York: Doubleday, 1976), pp.262-264.

24. Ibid., p.269.

Fiorenza<sup>25</sup> believes that Paul is not insisting that women wear a veil according to Jewish custom, because in verse 15 he states that women are given their hair as a head-covering. It is, therefore, more likely that Paul is instructing these women and men - as to the manner in which they should wear their hair whilst prophesying and praying. Fiorenza believes that Paul is attempting to distance Christian spiritual experiences from those of pagan cults. If the Corinthian women unbound their hair during worship they would be imitating the ecstatic frenzy common in cults such as that of Isis, Dionysos and Cybele, for in these cults dishevelled hair was a mark of ecstatic experience and true prophecy. As opposed to this type of frenzy, Paul demanded an ordered worship in the churches and pointed out in 14:23 that confused and disordered prophesying would appear to an unbeliever as madness, and would thus be a bar to evangelism. For Paul, edification and proclamation were the true signs of Spiritual activity, and not ecstatic frenzies.

Fiorenza adds that in the Jewish Christian context, loose hair for women had continued in Paul's day to be a sign of sin and impurity and thus prostitutes and adultresses had to wear their hair loose as a sign of their shame. Similarly, one of the signs of leprosy was the wearing of loose hair. With all these negative connotations, it is hardly surprising that Paul was in favour of bound hair as a head-covering. His goal in this passage then was not to

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25. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins, (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1983), pp.227-8.

reinforce sex-role stereotypes but to establish a firm order and evangelistic orientation for the community.

The reference to angels in verse 10 has always been considered rather obscure. Barrett understands the reference to be to the guardians of the created order, who would be offended by a departure from the principles in verse 3. The woman's "authority on her head" is likewise difficult to interpret. For Barrett, a woman speaking to God in prayer and disclosing God's word in prophecy needs a sign of authority and power from God, and a veil serves as a sign of this authority given to women. Bruce agrees with this interpretation. Héring, on the other hand, sees the veil as a way of preventing the angels from being led into temptation. And Conzelmann sees the "authority on her head" as a protection for the "natural weakness" of women!

The change in tone and message from verses 3-10 to verses 11 and 12 is quite marked. Barrett understands verse 11 to indicate that in Christ the situation of women in relation to men is changed. Being a helper to man is not a woman's role in Christ, "... in whom such distinctions are removed".<sup>26</sup> Verse 12 declares that man and woman alike owe their existence to God and depend completely on God. Nevertheless, Christians remain within the created order, and Paul is trying to accommodate his message to that situation. Conzelmann argues that there is a clear contradiction between verse 8 and verse 12, a contradiction which he describes as "particularly crass".<sup>27</sup> He

26. Barrett, 1 Corinthians, p.253.

27. Conzelmann, 1 Corinthians, p.190.

understands this contradiction to indicate that the cancellation of distinctions between man and woman takes place in the Lord, but not in the world order. Paul is not satisfied himself with his previous arguments, Conzelmann states, and this is indicated by his appeal to the reader's own judgment and to nature.

Finally, verse 16 shows that Paul does not rely on any of his grounds. Conzelmann concludes: "If we would discover a unified movement of thought in this section, then obviously we must seek to elucidate it in the light of verse 16. For it is here that Paul's real argument lies, namely the one based upon the Church, which in an awkward and obscure process of reasoning, can be discerned already in verse 11. Here there is no longer man or woman. Verses 11f and 16 have to be seen together ... the demand is not insisted upon by Paul as one of his, but is treated as being obviously a matter of established custom".<sup>28</sup>

Héring agrees with Conzelmann's interpretation of verses 11 and 12. In the Christian order, he declares, woman and man are equal. It is the natural order which makes woman inferior. Orr and Walther emphasize woman and man's equality in Christ. Whatever strictures Paul lays upon women and men in worship, he affirms an overriding principle of equality. W.G.H. Simon agrees, pointing out that verse 11 reasserts the complete dependence of man and woman upon one another. Whilst in verses 7, 8 and 9,

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28. Ibid., p.191.

Paul's exegesis of the Genesis accounts is heavily influenced by Rabbinic teaching and reflects the attitude of his time, his Christian understanding was at the end the

more powerful. Simon remarks that in verses 11 and 12 Paul's strong sense of the equality of men and women in Christ, "... is really too much for his rabbinical upbringing".<sup>29</sup>

It is Simon, too, who provides a pithy summing-up of 1 Cor:2-6. Speaking of Paul, he states that,

His attitude on the position of women in church was not a fixed one. He had enunciated early the great principle of sex-equality ... (Gal 3:28). But his background was sometimes too much for him ... he was no anti-feminist, but he was particularly anxious that Christianity should not be classed in the public mind with those popular types of religion in which women took a prominent and far from modest part.<sup>30</sup>

We shall be looking more closely at these popular religions and the effect they may have had on Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians. Before this, however, we must examine 1 Corinthians 14:33-36.

#### 1 Corinthians 14:33-36

Barrett questions how we are to reconcile the injunction in verse 34 with verse 5 of that chapter, which reads: "I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy ...", and with chapter 11 verse 5. He suggests two possible explanations. The first

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29. W.G.H. Simon, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, 4th impr. (Torch Bible Paperbacks), (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1971), p.113.

30. Ibid., p.111.

is that Paul did not write verses 34f. They were added later as a marginal note by someone else at a time when good order was essential and the freedom of the Spirit had thus to be curbed. Barrett sees no evidence that they were Paul's own marginal note. The second explanation is that Paul had been informed of some feminine pressure, possibly in the form of chatter, which was contributing seriously to disorder in Christian assemblies, and he felt that energetic measures were needed to remove it.<sup>31</sup> Barrett states that Paul could not have disapproved in principle of contributions made by women to Christian worship and discussion, or he would not have retained Chapter 11 verse 5 in his Epistle. However, just as he gave orders to a male prophet to be silent if his speech was likely to cause disorder and be unedifying to the community (verse 30), so he could, in the interests of good order and peace, command the women to be silent. The verb "to speak" in classical Greek used in reference to the women does, in fact, mean "to chatter", although in the New Testament the verb is not normally used in this way.

Barrett concludes that the contradictions with 14:5 and 11:5 support the theory that these verses are a later marginal note. This conclusion is firmly supported by Hans Conzelmann. Conzelmann points out that verses 34-35 are a self-contained section which upsets the context, interrupting the theme of prophecy and the flow of thought.<sup>32</sup> Like Barrett, he points to the contradiction with Chapter 11 verses 2f, where the active participation

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31. Barrett, 1 Corinthians, p.332.

32. Hans Conzelmann, 1 Corinthians, p.246.

of women in the church is presupposed. Even if chapters 11 and 14 are assigned to different letters, the contradiction remains. Furthermore, there are peculiarities of linguistic usage in this section, and verse 37 does not line up with verse 36, but with verse 33a. Conzelmann concludes that the section must be regarded as an interpolation, a conclusion which F.F. Bruce also reaches.<sup>33</sup>

Yet another scholar to reach this conclusion is Leonard Swidler. Swidler points out that Paul would be extremely unlikely to base a Christian argument on the Law, which he so often proclaims as having been fulfilled in Christ. Paul, in fact, consistently argues against the demands of the Law. Swidler also remarks on the strong similarity of the thought of this passage with the thought of 1 Tim 2:11-12. He concludes that 1 Cor 14:33b-36 is most likely an addition from Deutero-Pauline circles into the original manuscript.<sup>34</sup>

However, Héring understands the passage somewhat differently.<sup>35</sup> He understands verses 33-36 to be intended to silence those women who, contrary to Jewish and Greek custom, wished to take part in discussions in church. But this demand for silence was not applicable to women who spoke in a state of inspiration to deliver a message. Thus Héring sees a distinction between a woman who was preaching and a woman who was simply present at the worship. Only the latter was required to be silent. Héring, therefore,

33. F.F. Bruce, 1 and 2 Corinthians, p.135.

34. Leonard Swidler, Biblical Affirmations of Women, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1979), pp.324-5, 337.

35. Jean Héring, The First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians, (London: Epworth Press, 1952), p.159.

maintains that the contradiction between chapter 11 verse 5 and chapter 14 verse 33f does not exist. He does not, however, see the command for silence as eternally valid. Instead, he maintains that the reason for the command lies solely in a concern for order at that time. The command is thus relative and in modern times, where social conditions are greatly altered, it no longer has the same force.

Orr and Walther have yet another understanding of the text.<sup>36</sup> They believe that it is wives rather than women who are being addressed here, as there is only one Greek word for the two categories. The intent of the command is to avoid situations where wives publicly contradict their husbands or embarrass them by an interchange of conversation. The authority of the husband in that society was paramount and the wife should not be seen to reject it. Since in chapter 11 verse 5 Paul indicates that women could pray and prophesy in the church, unless this is a non-Pauline interpolation, Paul must be enjoining silence in matters other than praying and prophesying. Good order is a major emphasis of the context, and it must have been that on some occasions clamorous and excessive speaking on the part of the wives caused disorder in the congregation. The disgraceful aspect of the wives' actions would then refer to the shame imposed on the husbands by the public disrespect of their wives. In that particular social and religious context, Paul had to correct this problem.

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36. W.F. Orr and J.A. Walther, 1 Corinthians, pp.311-313.



Whichever understanding is most accurate, Barrett's reference to Calvin's attitude toward adiaphora seems particularly apt: Calvin wrote: "The discerning reader should come to the decision that the things which Paul is dealing with here are indifferent, neither good nor bad, and that they are forbidden only because they work against seemliness and edifications".<sup>37</sup>

To gain further insight into these passages, it is necessary to examine the historical and cultural context of Corinth at the time when Paul wrote his letters. Walter Schmithals argues strongly that there was a distinct Gnostic movement in Corinth at this time, and that elements of this movement had crept into the Christian church.<sup>38</sup> Schmithals follows Ernst Haenchen in believing that the women in the community who were prophesying with uncovered heads were in all probability Gnostic prophetesses. It is clear from 1 Cor 11:3-10, he argues, that an attempt had been made in Corinth to abolish head-covering for women. This attempt had been made by contentious persons (verse 16) whom Schmithals believes were Gnostics. He bases this argument partly on a close examination of verses 3-16. Paul's statement of "spiritual hierarchy" in verse 3 is made to prove that, since man is set over woman, what holds true for man does not hold true, necessarily, for woman. But this does not justify the specific view that women are to wear head-coverings. Besides, in verses 11-12, Paul effectively takes back all that he has said of the

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37. Barrett, 1 Corinthians, p.333.

38. Walter Schmithals, Gnosticism in Corinth, trans. John E. Steely, 3rd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), pp.123, 293-301.

inequality of the sexes. And Schmithals argues that the Christian equality of man and woman is the actual opinion of Paul. But this means that in verses 3-9 Paul is not arguing with full freedom, but is being pressured in a certain direction by his adversaries. His adversaries are most likely, therefore, to have been advocating an abolition of the distinctions between the sexes and, hence, the need for head-covering for women. Over against this, Paul's need to defend the old custom causes him to take his stand on the inequality of the sexes.

Paul's attempt to justify head-covering is described by Schmithals as trying first the impossible task of proving the necessity of head-covering through an argument which only proves the possibility that women must in some areas be different to man because woman is inferior to man.<sup>39</sup> Next comes the comparison to a prostitute which is an argument from social custom. Verse 7 reasserts male superiority and verses 8-9 give it biblical justification. These unsuccessful arguments are clearly forced upon Paul by opponents who do not accept the differentiation between the sexes. But these opponents, argues Schmithals, must surely be Gnostics. Gnosticism teaches that the "Pneuma" is the real self of the person and thus each person is neither male or female but part of the cosmic body and, in every respect, equal with others. Differences of sex belong to the realm of flesh and are unconnected with the true spirit of the person. The concept of "neither male nor female" expressed by Paul in Galatians 3:28 is regarded by

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39. Ibid., p.238.

Schmithals to be of Gnostic origin, and he quotes the Gnostic Gospel of the Egyptians in which the identical phrase reappears.

Paul was forced to secure obedience to his kerygma by commanding the maintenance of tradition. To retain the tradition of head-covering, Paul had to impose a rigid legalism. Since the Gnostics would have been encouraging the practice of Gnosis in the Christian community, Paul had to demand full renunciation of Gnostic behaviour. In this Paul "... takes a stand for an historial understanding of life over against the mythological one of the Gnostics".<sup>40</sup>

Schmithals also understands 1 Cor 14:33-36 in terms of the Gnostic threat. He believes that 1 Cor 14 and 1 Cor 11 belong to two separate letters and argues that Paul was not aware of the threat of Gnosticism when he implicitly accepted women praying and prophesying in 1 Cor 11:5. By the time he wrote 1 Cor 14 he was better informed and demanded that the Gnostic custom of allowing women to publicly pray and speak in tongues be discontinued. Fear of Gnostic belief and practice being able to control and distort Christian worship led Paul to limit Christian freedom for the sake of doctrinal purity. And in Gnosticism women preachers and prophetesses were prevalent. Priscilla and Maximilla from the sect of Montanism, the prophetesses of Marcus, and Simon's prophesying companion, Helena, are but a few examples of the widespread activity of women in the cult.

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40. Walter Schmithals, Gnosticism in Corinth, trans. John E. Steely, 3rd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), p.243.

Judaism in contrast excluded any cultic participation by women, and it was this tradition that Paul affirmed in opposition to Gnosticism. In the defence against Gnosticism, the silence of women had thus to become a law of the church. Schmithals concludes that:

In judging Paul one must keep in mind the special cause which compelled him, in the last analysis against his intention, to limit Christian freedom in this way, and one then will readily accept, without qualms and naturally also without legalism passages like 14:33ff as Pauline. One will then also, at the deepest level, feel no contradiction between 11:2ff and 14:33bff. It is the same correctly understood Christian freedom which lets Paul allow the activity of women in the cult there and forbid it here.<sup>41</sup>

Gerd Theissen approaches the problematic passages in Corinthians from another angle. He examines the social structure of the Christian community and concludes, from verses like 1 Cor 11:21, 22 and 34, that the community encompassed various strata of society.<sup>42</sup> It was neither a lower nor an upper class group, but incorporated both, a phenomenon which clearly led to a number of problems in the community. Theissen concludes that the Hellenistic world was largely better off materially than was Palestine; hence Paul's collections for the poor of Jerusalem (Rom 15:27, 2 Cor 9:12).

The Corinthian Christians moreover, whether Jew or Gentile, had a somewhat different world-view from their Palestinian counterparts; a Hellenistic world-view which incorporated a variety of cultural, ecological and economic factors. With a

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41. Ibid., p.244.

42. Gerd Thiessen, The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), pp.106-110.

Hellenistic social world, and with many members being comparatively wealthy, these Christians would have had great difficulty in accepting the ethical radicalism of the Jesus tradition, with its demands of surrendering family, property and home, and with its particular concern for the poor and oppressed.

In these congregations, therefore, there developed an ethos clearly different from that of the synoptic and Johannine traditions. This ethos is referred to by Theissen as love-patriarchalism, a concept he derives partly from the writings of Troeltsch. Love-patriarchalism evolved as a solution to class, wealth and status differences among Christians. It is most pronounced in the Deutero-Pauline and pastoral epistles, but its development is already discernable in Paul. Love-patriarchalism takes social differences for granted, but attempts to lessen their effect through imposing an obligation of respect and love upon the socially dominant members of the community. The weaker members are expected to respond with subordination, fidelity and esteem. Theissen points out that with this ethos, "... the great part of Hellenistic primitive Christianity mastered the task of shaping social relations within a community which, on the one hand, demanded of its members a high degree of solidarity and brotherliness and, on the other, encompassed various social strata ... Its historical effectiveness is rooted not least of all in its ability to integrate members of different strata. Members of the upper classes could find a fertile field of activity ... But the lower strata

were also at home here. They found a fundamental equality of status before God, solidarity and help in the concrete problems of life ...".<sup>43</sup>

Love-patriarchalism, Theissen remarks, is moderately socially conservative. However, it made a lasting impact on Christianity. It was instrumental in defeating Montanism and Gnosticism in the second century. More importantly for this study, Theissen maintains that, "It produced the church's fundamental norms and fashioned lasting institutions".<sup>44</sup> It prepared Christianity to incorporate great numbers of people from all walks of life. Love-patriarchalism provided a realistic solution to the problem of sharp social stratification.

Christian love-patriarchalism offered equality to all (Gal 3:18). However, this equality was true "in Christ" which was interpreted to be an internal, "spiritual" equality. In the political and social world, class differences among people were accepted and even religiously legitimised. This still occurs today.

Love-patriarchalism was an extremely successful method of shaping human relations. However, Theissen suggests that it is insufficient for shaping our social relationships in the

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43. Gerd Thiessen, The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth, ed. and trans. and with an intr. by J.H. Schütz. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), pp.107-108.

44. Ibid., p.108.

modern world.<sup>45</sup> Other social forms and traditions from Christianity, such as the ethical radicalism of Jesus in the synoptic gospels or the community bound by the love commandment as in John's gospel, must be explored today. In the twentieth century it is imperative that equality before God be re-examined. The social forms of Christianity of the past are not necessarily adequate to the needs of the modern world.

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45. Ibid., p.110.

D: THE HAUSTAFELN

In Ephesians, Colossians and the Pastoral Epistles can be found a code of ethics expressing the love-patriarchy ethos. This is generally referred to among exegetes as the Haustafeln, and addresses exhortations to husbands and wives, children and parents, and slaves and masters. J. Paul Sampley, in his study of Ephesians, reaches the definite conclusion that there existed some basic form of Haustafeln prior to their use in the New Testament.<sup>46</sup> This conclusion is also reached by James E. Crouch in his study of Colossians 3:18-4:1. Crouch argues that these verses constitute an independent paraemetic unit, and points out that "In view of both the composition and the content of the unit ... it is hardly conceivable that these exhortations were formulated on the spur of the moment in response to Colossian disorders ... both its composition and its loose relationship to its context indicate that it is an independent unit most probably of pre-Colossian origin".<sup>47</sup> Crouch compares Col 3:18-4:1 with Eph 5:22-6:9 and 1 Peter 2:13-3:7, and observes that all three exhibit a similar structure, with pairs of reciprocal exhortations. Moreover, the same Haustafeln unit appears in 1 Clement 1:3, 1 Clement 21:6-9, and a letter from Ignatius to

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46. J. Paul Sampley, And the Two Shall Become One Flesh: A Study

of Traditions in Ephesians 5:21-33, (Cambridge: U.P., 1971), p.117.

47. James E. Crouch, The Origin and Intention of the Colossian Haustafeln, (Göttingen: Vordenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1972), pp.10-11.



Polycarp (4:1-6:1). This unit appears in Colossians 3:18-4:1.

There are clearly considerable similarities between this text and Ephesians 5:21-6:9, and as Crouch points out, strong similarities also exist between a number of other texts, both within and outside the New Testament. Crouch's question then centres on the origin of the Haustafeln unit. Martin Dibelius and Karl Weidinger argue that the Colossian Haustafeln is a Christianized version of a non-Christian code. Crouch examines this argument and concedes that there is a certain amount of evidence for it, particularly amongst Stoic material. He further observes that there are various references to the state or ruling authorities in several New Testament Haustafeln, and argues that such references "... in a list of social duties can only be explained in terms of a relationship however indirect - to the Stoic scheme".<sup>48</sup>

However, Crouch also believes that there is a considerable Jewish element in the Haustafeln. He argues that the Jewish Christians and the Jewish Hellenistic Christians brought various domestic codes with them at their conversions which were adaptable to the Christian religion. The appeal to fear, or reverence, of the Lord in verse 22 of the Colossian Haustafeln indicates a distinctly Jewish influence. Moreover, Christian Haustafeln place more emphasis on the duties of the subordinate members than do the Stoic Haustafeln, thus indicating another source of influence upon

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48. Ibid., p.33.

them. Crouch concludes that it is impossible to trace the Christian Haustafeln to one single source. This conclusion is supported by the fact that there are variations between earlier and later New Testament Haustafeln which, he believes, cannot be explained merely as changes within a purely Christian tradition uninfluenced by non-Christian sources. Crouch sees the Colossian Haustafeln as based more on Hellenistic Jewish material than on Stoic material. "In terms highly reminiscent of elements of the New Testament Haustafeln, Philo and Josephus discuss the relation of a woman to her husband ... Both authors emphasize the subjection of the woman to her husband. In addition, each feels constrained to make the reservation that her subjection does not permit harsh treatment on the part of the husband.<sup>49</sup> Crouch feels, then, that although there was a Stoic influence in the composition of the Christian Haustafeln, most of the material from which it was compiled was Hellenistic Jewish. It would be wrong, however, to say that it is not a Christian creation. The material is reformulated by Christian teachers to deal with problems in Christian churches.

A number of exegetes have speculated as to the reasons why the Haustafeln were formulated in the Christian churches. Dibelius argues that a decisive cause was a gradual realization that the parousia was not imminent, a consequent need to fit into the existing society, and thus the Christian adaptation of socially approved codes of behaviour.<sup>50</sup> The relatively late appearance of the

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49. Ibid., p.85.

50. Ibid., p.14.

Haustafeln would give support to this thesis. Crouch suggests another reason. He observes that there must have been a general situation within the Hellenistic churches which gave rise to the Haustafeln, and further observes that the essential imperative of the Haustafeln is a demand imposed on the subordinate members to conform to the standards of society in their various relationships. He thus poses the hypothesis that enthusiastic tendencies created disorder in a significant segment of the Hellenistic churches, and this necessitated the incorporation of the Haustafeln into the general teaching material. Crouch believes that the feeling of liberation produced by a knowledge of Christ's sacrifice for all people caused Christians, especially those in weaker social positions, to feel themselves freed from not only the sins of the flesh but also from social institutions, especially marriage and slavery. He points to passages such as II Peter 2 which denounces Gnostic believers who are promising the Christian people freedom. The direct relevance of this promise to slaves is very probable. Gnostic Christian sects rejected slavery, a fact which indicates the especial attraction that the Gnostic promise of freedom must have had for slaves. It quite possibly had a similar attraction for wives. It is most striking that in 1 Corinthians Paul speaks in three separate instances to questions related to married women, and in two of these cases he emphasizes the submission of a wife to her husband. Later New Testament epistles consistently make the same demand.

Further evidence for Crouch's argument is found in 1 Corinthians 7, in Paul's discussion on divorce. Here Crouch

sees Paul's main emphasis to fall upon the wife.<sup>51</sup> And Paul again commands that each should retain the place in life to which the Lord has assigned them (verse 17). 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 is also important for this line of thought. The cause of the problem which gave rise to this passage very probably stemmed from enthusiasts arguing that the freedom offered by Christ abolished the distinctions of creation. Thus the head-covering, symbolizing the submission of a married woman to her husband, should be abolished. Paul's response shows clearly his fundamental concern for social customs to be maintained.

1 Corinthians 14:33-36 makes it even clearer that woman's freer behaviour was a threat to the order and stability of the congregation. Paul's references to "all the churches" in 1 Cor 7:17, 11:16 and 14:33b indicates that the problem was by no means confined to Corinth.

The emergence of the Hauستافeln is another indication that the problem was widespread. Pneumatic enthusiasm, Gnostic influence, and a consequent breaking of social norms is hereby evidenced to be a movement throughout the Hellenistic churches. The Pastoral epistles, in particular, bear witness to this. 2 Timothy 3:16 indicates that women especially responded to sectarian preachers. I Tim 6:1f suggests that slaves were trying to actualize their equality in Christ. I Tim 2:11, 5:15 and 4:1-4 all point to the problems of enthusiastic excesses.

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51. Ibid., p.130.

Another reason for the Haustafeln advocated by Crouch is a tension within the Hellenistic churches between Hellenistic religiosity and Judaism. The mystery cults in Hellenism regarded all members as equal through their common experience of the mysteries. The Dionysian cult, for example, must have influenced Hellenistic Christianity to quite a large extent. It too contained stories of the miraculous birth, violent death and resurrection of the deity. It also contained a missionary urge, sacrament, hymns and, most significantly, inspired utterances. Women formed a large part of the cult's followers, and their active participation in worship provides a striking parallel to the active worship of women in the Christian churches. Paul tries to counter such similarities by instituting the traditional Jewish role of women in worship. Crouch makes the important point that Paul's most severe suppression of female activity in worship appears in the context of his discussions of pneumatic worship in the congregation. The parallels with the mystery religions would unquestionably have concerned Paul and other Christian leaders in all the churches. He concludes then that the original cause of the Haustafeln was the perceived excesses of women and slaves. Fiorenza concurs with this theory. She suggests, however, that it was mainly excesses in slaves' behaviour which was of concern to the author of Colossians for, whilst the wives are very briefly instructed, the slaves have a lengthy exhortation addressed to them. The extent of this exhortation indicates the importance for the author of good behaviour in slaves.

The maintenance of the status quo for slaves in Christianity clearly indicates, Fiorenza argues, that these injunctions contain the voice of the propertied class. Similarly, they contain the voice of the dominant social sex. Colossians, she writes, "... shows how a so-called 'enthusiastic' realized eschatological perspective can produce an insistence on patriarchal behaviour as well as an acceptance of the established politico-social status quo of inequality and exploitation in the name of Jesus Christ".<sup>52</sup> Due to these excesses, the Hellenistic-Jewish Household Code was adopted into Christianity. Instructions to the different groups in society thus became more formalized and were expanded to include children in the structures of previous Haustafeln units. At the same time, as Crouch remarks, the Hellenistic Jewish practice of structuring their ethical codes with an emphasis on reciprocity caused the instructions to husbands, fathers and masters to be added.<sup>53</sup> Crouch sums up his investigation "... the evidence which we have clearly indicates that the emerging Orthodoxy retreated to the traditional Jewish position regarding women and that it did so in reaction against the excess of the pneumatic enthusiastic movement in the Hellenistic churches. Paul's statements regarding women and slaves which we have observed in 1 Corinthians constitute for us the earliest reaction against these excesses. The Pastoral Epistles constitute a later and more severe reaction".<sup>54</sup>

52. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, In Memory of Her, (London: SCM Press, 1983), p.254.

53. James E. Crouch, The Origin and Intention of the Colossian Haustafeln, pp.144-145.

54. *Ibid.*, p.141.

1. The Letter to the Ephesians: Ephesians 5:21 6:9

Verse 5:21 is extremely important, both in its meaning and in its position. It is not itself a part of the Haustafeln but stands immediately prior to the introduction of the Haustafeln instruction to wives. It is a general admonition calling for the submission of each Christian to the others, and may have been intended as a slight counterbalance to the instructions that follow. However, it certainly appears in the light of the Haustafeln to be more appropriate to wives, children and slaves and somewhat inappropriate to husbands, fathers and masters. It is thus clearly not in complete harmony with the Haustafeln injunctions. J.P. Sampley argues that, "The resolution of this exegetical dilemma is possible if 5.21 is understood as the author's critique of the basic stance of the Haustafeln form wherein one group is ordered to be submissive to another group vested with authority over it. By means of 5:21, the author introduces the entire Haustafeln form in such a way that the absolute submission and the absolute predominance of one or the other class is qualified from the very start by a mutual submission".<sup>55</sup> Having established the necessity for mutual submission, the author can then use the Haustafeln to serve his purpose.

The purpose of the Haustafeln, as has already been indicated by Crouch and Thiessen, was to establish unity, peace and order in the church. To achieve these ends it

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55. J. Paul Sampley, And the Two Shall Become One Flesh: A Study of Traditions in Ephesians 5:21-33, (Cambridge: U.P., 1971), p.117.

was necessary for all Christians to accept the situation in which they found themselves in relation to others. For wives, children and slaves in that particular social context, this meant submission, the acceptance of the authority of those placed over them. But the command for submission was also addressed to all Christians. For this reason, J.A. Allan defines submission not as a cringing yielding to the domination of others, but as a principle of mutual consideration.<sup>56</sup> Submission is the implementation of an attitude of respect for oneself and for others.

Allan points out that there are two apparently contradictory strands of teaching in the New Testament with relation to men and women. Ephesians 5:22-23 expresses the one view, where the man- woman relationship is approached "... in a way that at least seems to imply that woman is essentially an inferior being, which of course has always been more or less the characteristic male view".<sup>57</sup> Yet the New Testament also has a teaching which is the direct opposite of this, namely that in Christ all believers have equal spiritual status (Gal 3:28). Allan believes that such a teaching is remarkable at a time when male dominance was unquestioned to the extent that it was given religious sanction and support. He emphasizes that such texts as Ephesians 5:22 and Gal 3:28 must be held together to achieve a better understanding of the New Testament message.

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56. John A. Allan, The Epistle to the Ephesians: The Body of Christ, 2nd impr. (Torch Bible Paperbacks), (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1968), p.125.

57. John A. Allan, ibid., p.126.



Markus Barth understands the Greek verb hypotasso, translated as "submit" in the N.I.V., to mean "subordinate" rather than "submit". He maintains, with Sampley, that 5:21 relativizes and blurs any clear notion of authority and subservience. He believes the mutual subordination command to be a challenge to the conservative and patriarchal concepts of the social order of New Testament times, and argues that the message of Ephesians is lost if the dominant position of verse 21 over the Haustafel is ignored. Barth argues that the term "subordinate" in Ephesians describes "... a voluntary attitude of giving in, co-operating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden".<sup>58</sup> The author expects this kind of subordination only of Christ and of persons who are "in Christ". This subordination is a demonstration of the humility, gentleness, patience, love, unity and peace which are required in 4:1-3 and which are described as the action not of slaves but of the free children of God. Christian subordination is the voluntary behaviour of free and responsible persons.

Barth argues that the command to wives is given only within the framework of mutual subordination. To ignore this is to support a masculine superiority ethos which is not expressed here. "Ephesians 5:22 does not affirm that females (women) are inferior to males (men) and must on all societal and professional occasions take and retain the second rank".<sup>59</sup> Indeed, only wives are addressed, and the wife's

58. Markus Barth, Ephesians 4-6, Anchor Bible 34, 34a, 2 vols. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1974), reprint 1981), p.710.

59. Ibid., p.610.

subordination corresponds to the husband's subordination (verse 21) which is expressed in the self-giving love of Christ for the church. Furthermore, the author does not refer to nature, to social standards of decency, to the law, or to the fall as the ground and motivation of his command to wives. He refers solely to the Lord.

"The husband is the head of the wife" has often been interpreted, notably by Aquinas,<sup>60</sup> to mean that the relationship between husband and wife is analogous to that between soul and body. The noble soul (husband) must control and direct the base body (wife). Markus Barth remarks that, "The sufferings inflicted upon girls, brides and wives under the overt or hidden cover of the soul-body analogy are too great to be enumerated."<sup>61</sup> But Ephesians defines the concept "head" solely in terms of love for the wife. The husband is to give himself in order that his wife be perfect and radiant.

Barth points out that in verse 22 of the Greek New Testament the verb "subordinate" is missing, although in most translations it is presupposed as part of both verses 21 and 22. In verse 24b, the same verb, used in verse 24a, is not repeated. "The result of the elliptical diction chosen here and there is this: the author of Ephesians cannot be quoted as the originator or defendant of the flat command, "Wives must subordinate themselves". In this epistle there is no absolute degree enjoining women always to take, or to be bound to, an inferior place ... Subordination to love?

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60. Ibid., p.703.

61. Ibid., p.706.

Indeed! Only this and nothing else is preached in Ephesians 21-33".<sup>62</sup> The command "in everything" is likewise qualified by the command to husbands of love. It is also, of course, qualified by each Christian's responsibility to God first and foremost.

The love command to husbands needs to be most carefully examined. The wife is not asked to submit to arrogant domination. It is noteworthy that the command is only given within the context of Christ's love which is the source and standard of the husband's love. The love of Christ is concrete and pragmatic, and it extends even to death. 5:25-33 requires a husband to love his wife no less than four times. This love requires a commitment to the wife, a giving of self and possessions to her, a determination to help her to become perfect, and a devotion to her wellbeing which decisively excludes any use of her for an ulterior purpose. The husband is to love his wife for her own sake. By dwelling on the expression of Christ's love for all people, the husband learns the understanding and practice of love. The love between Christ and the church is described as the standard for the marriage of a woman and a man. This love is creative and self-giving; it is not oppressive, destructive, hurtful, condescending or exploitative. A wife loved in such a way is one with her husband, just as people loved by Christ are one in his body. Markus Barth argues that in the Bible neither body nor flesh have a derogatory meaning and, in Ephesians, the church title "body of Christ" is honorific; therefore

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62. Ibid., p.620.

comparing the wife to her husband's body is a glorification, and not a devaluation as the church fathers so often interpreted it.<sup>63</sup> The Genesis verse quoted in verse 31 further emphasizes a profound mutuality and equality.

Barth emphasises that the author of Ephesians was addressing specific problems in a specific situation. It is not a philosophical tract commanding abstract principles and eternal truths. Ephesus contained many secular and religious cults and movements, particularly the cult of the Great Mother and of Artemis, in which women played an active role. The New Testament indicates that in the early church, some women (1 Cor 11:5) and slaves (Onesimus) appear to have understood the freedom in Christ proclaimed by Paul to be both spiritual and social in its implications. As Schmithals has pointed out, such freedom could be abused and exploited by adherents to foreign sects.<sup>64</sup> The author's use of the Haustafel was probably partly in response to this problem. It is important to note, however, that although two similar Haustafeln are presented in Col 3:18-4:1, and 1 Peter 2:13-3:7, only the Ephesian version opens with a call to mutual subordination.

## 2. The Letter to the Colossians

Most of the exegesis of the exhortations in Ephesians applies equally to those in Colossians. Like Ephesians, the Colossian Haustafeln constitute an intermediary stage in the

63. Ibid., p.734.

64. Walter Schmithals, Gnosticism in Corinth, p.245.

reaction against pneumatic excesses between 1 Corinthians and the Pastoral Epistles, when a fixed form was being created for the purpose of combatting these excesses in the churches. The question that therefore becomes pertinent is that of the relevance of the Ephesian and Colossian Haustafeln for modern theology. Crouch attacks the approach which affirms the "eternal verity" of the Haustafeln, arguing that it ignores the historically conditioned nature of the material.<sup>65</sup> Few people today would suggest treating slavery as a divinely ordained institution. However, the Haustafeln commands the submission of wives. If one statement is seen as eternally true, then all statements must be given equal authority. The formulators of the Haustafeln understood and used it as a unit, and the modern exegete, to be true to the material, must do likewise. To take the Haustafeln out of their historical situation, Crouch argues, renders them meaningless. For meaning derives ultimately from the situation. The meaning of the Haustafeln, then, must be understood in terms of the problems and dangers with which its formulators were confronted. The Haustafeln insisted on historical concern - it rejected the approach typical of cults such as Gnosticism, which removed the believer from her or his historical situation.

The essential truth that the Colossian and Ephesian Haustafeln proclaim then is that Christians are not removed from the world, but live in a given historical situation, and must live out their faith in terms of that situation.

65. James E Crouch, The Origin and Intention of the Colossian Haustafeln, p.141.

"Thus understood, the Haustafeln do not require of the modern believer that he/she support institutions such as slavery and the submission of women or that he even hold to an 'outdated' view of the child-parent relationship. In reality the Haustafeln demand precisely the opposite. For the historical situation which the modern man must accept as given contains no room for slavery and accords to women a status different from that of earlier cultures."<sup>66</sup> A strict understanding of the Haustafeln does not capture the full message of the gospel and, in some situations, even directly opposes it. Matthew 10:34, 19:29 clearly indicates that there are situations where a Christian must choose between conformity to the social order and obedience to God. Modern Christians must, therefore, be critical not only of earlier social orders but also of their own.

### 3. The Pastoral Epistles

#### 1 Tim 2:8-15

In the Pastoral Epistles it is clear how important the teaching of the Haustafeln had become to the early church. A.T. Hanson in his study of the Pastoral Epistles, echoes Crouch's belief that the Haustafeln were Christianised pagan material adapted to meet the needs of the churches at that time in clarifying Christian social behaviour.<sup>67</sup> The command that women must dress "decently" might, in Hanson's opinion, have been part of the regular catechetical instruction. There is a similar passage in 1 Peter 3:1-6. Verses 11-15 also have parallels elsewhere in the New

66. Ibid., pp.158-159.

67. A.T. Hanson, The Pastoral Epistles, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans; London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1982), p.37.

Testament with Paul's teachings in 1 Cor 11 and 14 in Eph 5. However, Hanson is quick to point out the differences between Paul and the author of 1 Timothy. He argues that it is by no means certain that Paul did forbid women to speak in church; the command in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 may well have been a later insertion by some church leader who was concerned by the problem of disorder in the congregation caused by women. The view that women can be saved through bearing children is also totally un-Pauline. Hanson struggles with this view, finding it completely sub-Christian. He examines an alternative interpretation translating the verse as "brought safely through child birth". But he considers this an unsatisfactory translation, although preferable in terms of the author's reputation as a Christian teacher. Hanson concludes, "Just as the first half of the chapter showed us the author at his best, so the second half seems to show him at his worst. Christians are under no obligation to accept his teaching on women".<sup>68</sup>

Verse 12 is a difficult verse, which Barrett translates "have authority over a man" as "domineer over her husband".<sup>69</sup> Both Hanson and Barrett point to Chapter 4 verse 3 where the author is writing against "hypocritical liars", very likely Gnostics who, amongst other things, were teaching against "marriage".<sup>70</sup> This the Gnostics would probably have regarded as an evil institution as it brought more people into the world, and to be born into the world

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68. Ibid., p.38.

69. C.K. Barrett, The Pastoral Epistles, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p.55.

70. Ibid., p.55; Hansen, The Pastoral Epistles, p.73.

was to be damned. As against this the author of 1 Timothy taught that women were to be silent and submissive - many Gnostic leaders and teachers were women - and that marriage was an institution through which the process of salvation could occur. Hanson insists that this context of the Gnostic threat must be clearly understood when interpreting verses 9-15.

Hanson understands the deception of Eve in Verse 14 as being a "sexual seduction": Eve was seduced by Satan. For this reason, Adam is not regarded as having been deceived.<sup>71</sup> This was a common Jewish legend, of which Paul was also aware, as illustrated by 2 Corinthians 11:2-4 and 14. (However, Paul understood original sin to have been disobedience, not a sexual transgression.) Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann also interpret the reference to Eve's deception in this way.<sup>72</sup> They further point out that there was a tradition in Judaism that held that when someone sins, through that same act he or she is later saved. For this reason motherhood, in particular, is the vehicle through which women are saved. Barrett places particular emphasis on the need not to misunderstand the meaning of this passage. It is not denied that man sinned, and that woman too was created by God.<sup>73</sup>

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71. A.T. Hanson, The Pastoral Letters, (Cambridge University Press, 1966), p.37.

72. Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, The Pastoral Epistles, trans. Philip Buttolph and Adela Yarbro, (ed.), Helmut Koestler, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), p.47.

73. C.K. Barrett, The Pastoral Epistles, p.36.



Dibelius and Conzelmann point to both the influence of the Haustafeln and the problem of Gnosticism in their summing up of the passage : "In these instructions for women, rules of the worship service and injunction for daily life seem to stand side by side. This results from the fact that the church order has been expanded with general paraenetic material (derived from rules for the household). The motivation and objective of this extensive treatment of the questions relating to women are to be sought in the situation of the congregations which the author has in mind."<sup>74</sup>

1 Timothy 3:11.

The translation "wives" is said by Dibelius and Conzelmann to be questionable - it is not clear whether wives or women deacons are referred to.<sup>75</sup> Hanson states that the majority of modern scholars believe that deaconesses/women deacons are referred to here, although Hanson himself is doubtful of this.<sup>76</sup> Barrett considers the arguments for each translation and cautiously concludes that the weight of the argument favours the translation as "deacons".<sup>77</sup> He points out that women ministers were well known in the apostolic church, as both the New Testament itself and Pliny's reference to Christian women workers indicate. Donald Guthrie concludes that, although the evidence is too general to indicate a distinct order of deaconesses, it is probable that the verse refers to some kind of female

74. Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, The Pastoral Epistles, p.48.

75. Ibid., p.58.

76. A.T. Hansen, The Pastoral Epistles, p.74.

77. C.K. Barrett, The Pastoral Epistles, pp.61-62.

servant of the Church who would, in all probability, have carried out the duties of visiting and helping in the baptism of women.<sup>78</sup> E.F. Scott reaches a similar conclusion, stating "It is probably deaconesses who are intended in this verse, although the rule is so framed as to make it applicable to all female workers".<sup>79</sup>

### Titus 2:1-10

Titus 2:1-10 provides an interesting formulation of the general code. Hanson remarks that this text, which claims to be of sound doctrine, "has very little to do with Christian doctrine as such, but consists of precepts appropriate to almost any set of people who wished to be respectable in the eyes of the author's contemporaries. The author was certainly not much interested in theology as such".<sup>80</sup> Dibelius and Conzelmann are in agreement with this description. They argue that the entire list of duties was written with the view of confuting the opponents of Christianity.<sup>81</sup> Verses 5, 8 and 10 emphasise this; concern about opponents runs throughout the text. Dibelius and Conzelmann remark that the church is clearly trying to cope with a world none too friendly towards it.

E.F. Scott perceives in the command to wives the same difficulty regarding the freedom of women that has been seen in the other occurrences of the Haustafeln in the New

78. Donald Guthrie, The Pastoral Epistles, (London: Tyndale Press, 1957), p.85.

79. E.F. Scott, The Pastoral Epistles, 6th impr. (Moffatt New Testament Commentary), (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1957), p.37.

80. A.T. Hanson, The Pastoral Letters, p.112.

81. Dibelius and Conzelmann, The Pastoral Epistles, p.141.

Testament. Scott believes that any departure of Christian women from the contemporary role of submission and decorum on the grounds of Christian freedom, created a major hindrance to the work and, perhaps, even the survival of the church. He points to the command in verse 3 to be subject to the rulers and authorities. There is little doubt that the church was in danger from the authorities. "For some time now Christianity had been under suspicion, and all symptoms of disaffection to the State were noted and magnified. Any resistance to authority might give the signal for a persecution which would put the whole Church in danger".<sup>82</sup> For this reason, obedience to authority of all kinds was strongly stressed. Resistance to husbands, to masters and to the State were too great a threat to the survival of the church.

1 Peter 2:18 and 3:1-7.

David Balch, like Crouch in his study of Colossians, believes that both Jewish and Hellenistic sources went into the formation of the Christian Haustafeln. But he differs from Crouch in the degree of derivation he attributes to the Greek and in particular, Stoic, domestic codes. Plato and Aristotle were both unquestioning of the belief that women were to be ruled by men. The New Testament pattern of subordination in the household codes with its pairs and its interest in the submission of the inferior member of each pair exists strongly in Greek literature.<sup>83</sup> Thus,

82. E.F. Scott, The Pastoral Epistles, p.172.

83. Balch believes that this ethic was developed in classical Greek discussions of the constitution in which the city and the house were hierarchically ordered. Plato thought that it was axiomatic that relationships in these spheres should have a ruler.

Balch concludes that the household codes and the beliefs which underlie them were close to being universal during that period.

Like most other commentators, Balch observes that the Haustafeln do not appear early in the Pauline letters, but are characteristic of later Pauline traditions and of 1 Peter. He believes that the Haustafeln of 1 Peter presents aspects of the tensions between Roman society and foreign religions. These tensions gave rise to stereotyped Roman criticisms of the customs of foreign religions, and prominent among these criticisms were those aimed at household relationships. Several texts in 1 Peter should be read in the light of this social situation. The Haustafeln in particular indicate awareness of pagan

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There was less discussion on the topic among Middle Platonists and they proposed little change. The chapter titles in Stobaeus indicate that such ideas were a popular topic in the Roman period. Balch argues that the topos, "concerning household management", was a popular one at the time the Pastoral Epistles were formulated. This topos was used in Bythunia near the approximate date of 1 Peter by Dio Chrysostom. The same topos appears in Aristotle. It consists of three pairs: master-slave, husband-wife and father-children. The concern for authority and submission within these relationships is central. Aristotle believed that authority and submission were natural conditions. Others to discuss this topos were the Peripatetics, the Stoic Areius Didymus and Cicero. Eclectic Stoics such as Ariston, Hecaton, Seneca and Hierocles all mention the topos. It was discussed by the Neopythagoreans and by Hellenistic Jews. Philo used it to interpret the Decalogue and both he and Josephus mentioned that the woman is in all things inferior to the man, and must, accordingly, be submissive. Octavian informed his soldiers that no woman should be allowed to make herself equal to a man. Sophocles and Herodotus discussed in disparaging terms the Egyptian custom of allowing women equal power and authority with men, and wives with husbands. See David L. Balch, Let Wives be Submissive: The Domestic Code in 1 Peter, (California: Scholars Press, 1981), pp.61ff.

slanders of Christians. In 1 Peter 2:15 the purpose of the behaviour exhorted is "to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men", 1 Peter 3:16 and 4:4 are other examples. The author's commands are thus intended to reduce the social and political tension between society and the churches. 1 Peter 3:8-9 exhorts Christians to live in harmony, an extremely necessary exhortation in a situation where slaves and wives of pagan men had converted to a hated foreign religion.

Fiorenza supports this approach, arguing that the command of submission to wives is clearly intended to lessen the tension between Christian wives and pagan husbands, and to help the wives to proselytize their husbands through virtuous behaviour.<sup>84</sup> For Fiorenza, the command is definitely not a timeless and immutable law, totally removed from the context, seeking to establish Christian wives firmly in subordinate roles forever. Quite the reverse; it was a tactic designed to lessen the enormous tension that had grown up precisely between Christian teachings and the patriarchal and hierarchical structure of society. If the Christian gospel which produced these churches had had a patriarchal structure of human relationships as part of its essential message, great tension would never have arisen. It was precisely the egalitarian and liberating message of the gospel which produced such tension between those who believed this message and those who still clung to the unjust hierarchical and patriarchal structures of society. And naturally such a

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84. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, In Memory of Her, pp.260-265.

liberating message was extremely attractive to the weaker members of society - the women and slaves - and very revolutionary and seditious to the dominant members of society - the married and slave-owning men. The persecution of the churches as a result of their disturbing message was as predictable as the church's efforts to survive in a hostile environment through a partial negation of many of the implications of its own teachings.

Balch refers to many examples from early Christian history which reveal that conversion to Christianity caused household problems for slaves and women. 1 Peter 1:12 and 2:15; Titus 2:3-5 and 2:8-10; 1 Tim 5:14; and the Apostolic Constitutions 1:10 are among these examples. "These texts show clearly that the lack of submission of wives to their husbands would be a source of slander or blasphemy against Christianity. They support the suggestion that the 'apology' anticipated in 1 Peter 3:15 would assure outsiders that Christians would conform to the kind of behaviour in the household demanded by society, i.e. demanded by masters, husbands and governors."<sup>85</sup> Christian wives and slaves were already doubtless disobeying their husbands and masters by belonging to the disliked Christian religion. These wives and slaves would, therefore, have been regarded as insubordinate and perhaps seditious. The author of 1 Peter needed to instruct these people to obey their husbands and masters in all other things, and how to relate to these non-Christians in so tense a situation. The fact that in the Aristotelian Haustafeln it was the masters,

<sup>85.</sup> David L. Balch, Let Wives Be Submissive; p.92.

husbands and fathers who were principally addressed, whilst in the New Testament the emphasis is generally on the subordinate members of the household is further evidence of the situation. It was the subordinate members who were in the difficult position due to their Christian beliefs. They were the focus of an intense social problem between their church and their society.

It has already been established that submission of wives to husbands was a widespread and popular belief of the time. This hierarchical relationship was thus not a Christian creation, but was adopted in Christianity as a means of diffusing social pressure and of preserving harmony in the households where Christians and unbelievers lived side by side. Similarly, modest dress was very possibly a popular social demand for women. Christian women were thus exhorted to dress properly, so as to conform to society and even perhaps help to convert the husband or father. Balch points out that an austere dress would be a significant contrast with the practices of cults such as that of Artemis or Isis.<sup>86</sup> Gentleness, too, had always been regarded as appropriate for women and was a good response generally to slander and abuse. It could also be seen as a conversion tactic.

Fiorenza, like Balch, maintains that the accusation of first- and second-century pagans, that Christianity was disturbing and even

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86. David L. Balch, Let Wives Be Submissive, p.101.

destroying the household, was by no means unfounded.<sup>87</sup> For women and slaves to have a different religion from the paterfamilias was already a serious breach of household structure. Obedience to Christianity was higher and more important than obedience to the head of the household, and this constituted a fundamental breach in the whole concept of household life. The message of liberty and egalitarianism which Christianity proclaimed was potentially an outright challenge to the hierarchical and exploitative relationships in which wives and slaves were forced to live. Pagan reaction to Judaism, which was seen as destroying religious, family and national loyalties, and to the Isis cult, which preached equality of men and women, was similarly angry and intolerant. These religions, too, posed a fundamental threat to the structure and stability of the patriarchal household. Christianity was potentially yet another major threat to social structures, and was accordingly attacked and persecuted.

Balch concludes that the situation to which 1 Peter is addressed is one of considerable pressure and perhaps already persecution. Thus the Christians were exhorted to behave in accordance with social custom and to obey those in authority. If this failed then they were not to be afraid, but were to deliver themselves into the hands of their creator, who is faithful, and whose judgment over the world has already begun. On the evidence, therefore, it is probable that the stimulus for the adoption of the Haustafeln did not come primarily

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87. Fiorenza, In Memory of Her, p.265.



from within the church, but from the demand of society that all its members conform to Roman socio-political customs. The church in self-defence stressed the correct household codes of behaviour. Balch remarks that "The traditional Greek ethic is intended to have a specific-apologetic-function in a problematic situation in certain provinces of Asia Minor in the last third of the first century A.D".<sup>88</sup>

Fiorenza makes an extremely important observation concerning the Haustafeln, particularly those in 1 Peter.<sup>89</sup> She points out that the social and political pressure to conform to the existing structures of society produced in Christianity a strong move to spiritualize, internalize and personalize the message of the gospels. Persecution gave rise to Christianity as a personal calling which did not challenge or disrupt the established social order. The radical social ethics of Christ became lost in an individualized faith which far from challenging evil social structures as Christ did, actually accepted and incorporated them into the Christian religion, giving them Christian meaning and validity.

The Pastoral Epistles show the beginning of the development of clericalization in the Christian church into a hierarchical and monarchical institution capable of replacing the political structures of the Roman Empire. Similarly, as Fiorenza observes, the Haustafeln bear clear evidence of the process of patriarchalization of the

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88. Ibid., p.106.

89. Fiorenza, In Memory of Her, ibid., p.266.

ministry and of the church.<sup>90</sup> It seems probable that the early Christian missionary movement possessed both the patriarchal self-understanding and structure inherited from Judaism and the social mores of the time, and an egalitarian theology inherited from the teachings and actions of Jesus himself. There is considerable evidence in Acts and in apocryphal works to show that the very early Christian communities practiced egalitarian methods of authority and leadership to a far greater extent than is done today (Acts 1:26; 2:44; 4:32; 6:5; 15:22; I Cor 11:17-33; 12:12).

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90. Ibid., p.279.

# E: TEXTS ON THE NATURE OF GOD

Throughout the Old and the New Testament God is referred to in the overwhelming majority of cases by means of masculine symbolism. Added to this, God became incarnate as a man. Those who oppose women priests thus maintain that only masculine symbolism of God is appropriate, as this is the language in which the divine revelation took place, and is thus the symbolism which God has chosen for himself. Furthermore, Jesus himself taught his followers to pray to God as Father, and this is the most fundamental and personal form of address between a Christian and God.

However, advocates of women's ordination point out that although most of the biblical images of God are masculine, there are a number of feminine images in the bible also, and these primarily image God as Mother. Genesis 1:26-27 states clearly that both male and female are made in the image of God. Numbers 11:12 indicate that God conceived and gave birth to the Jewish people. Psalms 22:9 and 71:6 similarly indicate that God brought the author out of the womb. Isaiah 66:9 states: "'Do I bring to the moment of birth and not give delivery?' says the Lord". Again, in Isaiah 42:14b, God says: "But now, like a woman in childbirth, I cry out, I gasp and pant". And in Isaiah 49:14-15: "But Zion said: 'The Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me'. 'Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!'" And yet again, in Isaiah

66:13, God promises to comfort Israel as a mother comforts her child. Deuteronomy 32:18 speaks to the Israelites: "You deserted the Rock, who fathered you; you forgot the God who gave you birth". This is a particularly good image of the Father - Mother - Creator God. Job 31:15 is yet another image of God as the One who creates the child in the womb, and Jeremiah 1:5 quotes God as saying: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you ...". And Psalm 123:2 has another dual image of God: "As the eyes of slaves look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid look to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God ...".

Those in favour of women's ordination further point out that the Old Testament concepts of Sophia and the Shechinah must not be overlooked. The wisdom of God and the Spirit of God, both extremely important images of God, are feminine images. Both express feminine aspects of God's self-revelation to the Jewish people. Unfortunately both were replaced by male images in Christian thought: Sophia with Logos and the Shechinah with the Holy Spirit. Thus a mode of expressing the feminine element of the divine was lost to Christianity.

In the New Testament, Jesus uses a number of feminine images for God and for himself. Luke 15 describes three parables describing God's concern over a sinner. The parables of the lost sheep and of the prodigal son, imaging God as shepherd and father, are well known. But equally important, although far less used, is the parable of the woman and the lost coin. Yet this parable uses the image of a woman in describing God. Jesus also images himself as female when he

mourns Jerusalem, "... how often have I longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings ..." (Mt 23:37; Lk 13:34). Thus, running through the Scriptures, is a clear tradition which images God as feminine, predominantly as mother.<sup>91</sup>

Another point made by the advocates of women priests is that many images used to describe God are asexual. The greatest of these is undoubtedly Love, but Rock, Fortress, Vine, Creator, Redeemer, etc., are all reflective not of God as father or mother, but of God as spirit. Most important of all, the image of God as Trinity must be considered. The most commonly used description of the trinity is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, all of which are imaged as masculine. However, an understanding of God as Trinity is not an understanding of three male figures. It is an understanding that God's fundamental nature is that of love, and in particular of love in relationship. Thus the Trinity expresses the love and inter-dependence of the different images through which we understand God. It is through the Trinitarian image that the concept of humanity as made in

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91. Despite the low value of women which developed in Christian thought and which culminated in Aquinas' teaching that women alone were not in the image of God, these feminine images of God did not disappear completely. They reappeared overtly in mystic theology, in particular that of Julian of Norwich, and covertly in the quasi-divine status that Mary the mother of Jesus came to possess. There can be little doubt, however, that the contempt for women so clearly expressed in much Christian theology suppressed or rejected even the relatively small amount of feminine divine imaging which had existed in Jewish theology. The understanding of women as weak, fleshly and subordinate seemed in direct contradiction to the power and majesty of God; a power and majesty which quickly became reflected in the (male) church hierarchy - the "princes of the church".

the image of God becomes most explicit. As God's fundamental nature is love in relationship, thus the image of God in humanity is fundamentally male and female in relationship. Thus the Trinity does not describe a God composed of three masculine images - an understanding of God which comes dangerously close to losing its monotheistic character - but a God whose ultimate nature is that of loving relationship, fellowship and community; a nature which all Christians are commanded by Christ to follow.

Thus E.L. Mascall's statement in an earlier chapter that God is our father in heaven and not our mother, is not borne out by an examination of scripture. The tradition of God as mother does exist in the Bible, and cannot and should not be denied. Similarly, Graham Leonard's claim that God has chosen to speak of himself solely in masculine images is incorrect. God's self-revelation includes feminine and asexual images. One must, however, consider the very important question of whether God in fact intended the majority of images used of him to be masculine images. In response to this question it is necessary to observe certain facts.

The Old and New Testaments were both written in societies in which men were dominant. Men were almost exclusively the rulers, they were the heads of their households, they alone could be priests, and they produced the overwhelming majority of religious writing, teaching and theology. In these societies, women were in general oriented to the home and were frequently denied even the rudiments of education.

Because of these social structures, it is clear that it is God's self-revelation as experienced by men that was most likely to be recorded. With little education and less access to the religious power structure and the religious literature, it is unlikely that God's self-revelation to women would ever have been much recorded. Furthermore, the ways in which God was perceived and imaged were likely to be in terms of male and not female reality. Thus, Ruler, Judge, High Priest, Father and Husband all became meaningful images for the dominant male understanding of their God. However, God's self-revelation to women, and women's images of God as Mother, Creator, She who gives birth to the people of Israel, who mourns for and has compassion on her erring children; these images are less common in the Old Testament, and appear mainly in covert form, in association with Mary the Mother of God, in the New Testament.

In assessing this evidence, we must conclude that it is impossible, not to say intellectually dishonest, to claim that God has chosen to reveal himself in predominantly masculine images. One might as well argue that God chose to reveal himself in white human images rather than in black human images. Western art and theology certainly conceptualize God in terms of white male images, but few theologians would dare to claim that white images of God are more reflective of God than are black images, and although white Christians may have difficulty relating to a black Christ, they are unlikely to claim that it is contrary to the will of God to be portrayed or represented in that way. Yet this is claimed in relation to feminine portrayals and

images of God. If humanity is created in the image of God, and God is beyond sexual distinction, then images couched in either masculine or feminine imagery are reflective of God's nature. However, supremely reflective of God's nature are masculine and feminine images in relationship, exemplifying the love and mutual dependency of the Persons of the Trinity. Christian Howard quotes Paul Jewett's argument

... that the creation of Man in the divine image as male and female can hardly mean that Man is like God as male rather than female. Since God is a fellowship of persons (Father, Son, Spirit) and Man is a fellowship of persons (man and woman), therefore Man is like God as Man in fellowship with woman, not as Man in distinction from woman.

Such a conclusion, which appears to be beyond dispute, requires that we construe the masculine language about God analogically not literally, when we interpret Scripture. The univocal element in the analogy is the personal, not the sexual, meaning of the language.<sup>92</sup>

It is necessary at this point to look briefly at Jesus' use of the name "Abba", which has given rise to the Christian emphasis on "Father" as a meaningful way of addressing God. I. Howard Marshall, in his commentary on the Lord's Prayer in the Gospel of Luke, refers to the use of "Abba" as an "intimate form of address", and states that,

The use of the intimate form was the amazing new thing that Jesus wished to teach his disciples, initiating them into the same close relationship with the Father that he enjoyed ... The force of the term is to assure the disciples of God's loving care for them, so that they can ask him for gifts with the certainty of being heard.<sup>93</sup>

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92. Christian Howard, The Ordination of Women to the Priesthood: Further Report, (London: C.I.O. Publishing, 1984), p.82.

93. I. Howard Marshall, The Gospel of Luke, (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1978), pp.456-457.



Thus, the use of "Abba" was intended by Jesus to stress, not God's "masculinity", but God's caring, parental love for humanity, and the close, personal intimacy which could exist between God and Christians. God's fatherhood lay for Jesus in his intimate love for his people. The image of fatherhood is, therefore, not "proof" of the superiority of masculine over feminine images of God, but is a message of God's love and deep concern for all people. God is our Father because God is our Creator, the source of life and love.

Following Jesus' teaching, Christians have long enjoyed an intimate, personal relationship with God. "Father" is one of the most powerful and valuable images which is used to relate to God. But it must not be forgotten that "Father" can be translated as "Loving Creator", and that "Love" and "Creator" are not gender-specific. "God as Father" cannot be translated as "God as Male Loving Creator". God is not male, and this fact must never be overlooked when personal, and thus sexual images for God are used. Behind each personal image lies a gender-free image. "Father" becomes "Loving Creator", "Shepherd" becomes "Nurturer and Caretaker", "King and Lord" become "All-Powerful and All-Mighty", "Bridegroom" becomes "Lover" and "Spouse", and "Son" can be translated as "Word", but not as "Male Word". Thus although Christian personal images can describe God, they cannot fully describe God who is above human limitations, and they certainly cannot describe God as more accurately represented by a masculine image than by a feminine image. To do this would be to attempt to define

God through images which are at best analogical, never definitive.

Those who argue that God "chooses" to be revealed in masculine images ignore the power of images and symbols in reflecting and shaping actual experience. Theoretically God is not male, but symbolically he is. The reality of male social and religious power is thus projected upon God, and male images of God are then used to legitimate and reinforce the social structure. In time the belief system becomes hardened and objectified, and it is believed that God personally chose to be revealed in male images. But the reverse, that male power structures created symbols of God in their own image is in fact more likely. For if masculinity is not in fact more inherent to the nature of God than is femininity, then why should God "choose" to be revealed in only one sexual image? The Godhead is equally the source of masculinity and femininity, and God reveals himself equally to men and women. Both sexual modes are thus equally capable of imaging God.

On one level it must be accepted that God is beyond all attempts to describe him. The human mind is not capable of conceiving God. As Robert Hamerton-Kelly points out, "There are certain dimensions of experience that are only accessible through symbols".<sup>94</sup> For the "Father" symbol, he continues, "... the Bible uses either simile or metaphor: God is like a father, God is our father".<sup>95</sup> To confuse the

94. Robert Hamerton-Kelly, God the Father: Theology and Patriarchy in the Teaching of Jesus, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p.19.

95. Ibid., p.21.

symbol or image with the reality to which it points is a simple and forgivable blunder. But to contend that the divine, infinite, transcendent and ultimate Reality which we call God can only be described and related to in terms of male symbolism is more than mere blunder. It is an attempt to create and to define God in the image of the dominant social group, and is indicative of an overweening pride that stops little short of blasphemy and idolatry.

However, as Sallie McFague points out, although it is inappropriate to equate human words with the divine reality, it is also incorrect to see no relationship between them at all.<sup>96</sup> Symbols and images are fingers pointing toward the divine reality, and as such they are indispensable. McFague points to the necessity for there to be many complementary models to describe the richness and complexity of the relationship between God and humankind. Many models also help to avoid the danger of the idolatrous use of one particular symbol.

We would agree with McFague that there are many symbols which may express the reality of God. However, we contend that the symbol of God as Trinity is of central importance to theology. No other symbol has such depth of meaning; no other symbol incorporates so much of our Christian understanding of God; and no other symbol expresses so clearly the nature of God as loving relationship. However the symbol has been misused in the cause of patriarchal

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96. Sallie McFague, Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), p.7.

religion. God in the Trinity is Creator, Redeemer and Presence. God is not Father in a human hierarchical system, but Creator. God is not Son in human sexual reproduction, but Redeemer. God is not Spirit as a masculine alter ego of the masculine Jesus, but the Presence of God working in history towards the eschaton. The trinity describes God as Love, fulfilling Love's purpose in history.

### Conclusion

The evidence mustered by the opponents to women's ordination based upon the bible may therefore be summarized as follows. An honest look at the creation narratives reveals no God-ordained male dominance, only the prophecy of sinful oppression by human beings of each other. The texts on the nature of God do not and cannot establish either the deliberate "choice" of God of self-revelation in masculine terms, or the inherent masculinity of God based on the incarnation in male flesh. And the New Testament texts concerning women, properly exegeted, indicate that the commands to women are by no means as clear-cut as they may appear. Contradictions within the texts, Jewish and Hellenistic influences, and extremely powerful sociological factors, raise the question as to whether the injunctions to women are time- and situation-dependent, or are the eternal command of God. The opinion of the scholars consulted tends towards the belief that the Haustafeln are bound to a particular time and context and cannot be simply extrapolated into the twentieth century.

Furthermore, the first Christians' experience of the gifts of the Spirit would have enabled them to use their

abilities with considerable freedom, and without fixed leadership structures. Authority and leadership perhaps alternated between various members of the community at different times, instead of remaining in the same hands almost indefinitely as is sometimes the case today. However, this free and flexible structure clearly did not last long. In the second century a shift took place from charismatic and communal authority to authority vested in local officers. These gradually incorporated both the teaching authority of the prophets and apostles and the decision-making process of the community. Furthermore, the shift moved from egalitarian leadership positions accessible to all the baptized to hierarchical leadership restricted to men. The church thus became structured, as is already the case in the Pastoral Epistles, along the lines of the Jewish and Greco-Roman patriarchal household. 1 Timothy 3:15 states that the church is the household of God and 1 Timothy 3:2f and Titus 1:7f describe the paterfamilias, or bishop, whose task it is to administer this household. The qualities demanded of a bishop in these texts coincide almost completely with those of a good head of the household. He would be dominant in the community and all members must subject themselves to him, just as in the large households of the secular world at that time. The main emphasis in the Pastoral Epistles is upon one of the virtues dear to the Roman heart - obedience and submission to those in authority. From this the unavoidable conclusion arises that the institutionalization of the Christian movement into the rigid and patriarchal church of the Holy Roman Empire was a development dictated

not by the guidance of the Spirit but by the demands of society to conform to its own standards. As Christians we should be searching the Bible today for guidance from the Jesus movement, not for the incorporated values of the society which that movement was endeavouring to transform into the Kingdom of God.

Thus, reliance by the opponents of the ordination of women on the Haustafeln in the New Testament, as well as upon Genesis 2 and 3, to support their demand for woman's subordination, cannot stand up to close scrutiny. Indeed, their interpretation accords neither with the message of Genesis 2 itself, nor with the death and resurrection of Christ which offers freedom to humanity from sin and suffering. As Paul and other New Testament writers themselves maintained, Christians are no longer slaves to sin. The sin of distorted and perverted relationships between the sexes is no longer in control; Christians are able to discard it and return to the loving partnership described in Genesis 1 and 2. But Christians have always lived in tension between this world and the coming Kingdom. The teachings of the Kingdom are not easily put into practice when opposed by the sin of this world.

## Chapter 6: BIBLICAL EVIDENCE FOR THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN

The biblical evidence cited against the ordination of women is far from conclusive. We turn thus to examine the New Testament texts quoted as evidence in favour of the priesting of women. The crucial point to be made about these texts is that no one text can be used as conclusive evidence for the ordination of women. It is the cumulative evidence of a number of texts which points to the total acceptability and equality of women together with men in the Body of Christ and the Kingdom of God.

The texts we shall be examining show Christ's liberation of women from social and religious structures of oppression. They show his love and affirmation of women as fully human, made in the image of God. Thus, the texts indicate a completely different attitude towards women on the part of Jesus Christ to the attitude towards women expressed in the subordination texts.

### THE GOSPELS

#### 1. Jesus' Interactions with Women

##### (a) The Healings of Jesus

Jesus healed many women both physically and psychologically during his few years in public ministry. One example of physical healing is the story of the woman bent double, in

Luke 13:10-17. This woman had been crippled for eighteen years. When Jesus saw her he called her, set his hands upon her, and healed her. Immediately he was reprimanded by a religious leader for healing on the Sabbath. Jesus called this man a hypocrite, pointing out that he gave water to his livestock on the Sabbath, yet condemned an act of healing. There are two striking elements to this story. Jesus called the woman "a daughter of Abraham" (verse 16). This is the only place in the New Testament that a woman is called a daughter of Abraham, on the same footing as the oft-referred-to sons of Abraham. This is a fundamental affirmation of the woman's worth, and indicates that Jesus apportioned equal worth to women and men in the sight of God.

A second, and even more striking element of this story is the fact that Jesus broke the Sabbath law in healing this woman. He saw her as more important than the Sabbath, and more important than his own standing and security in the community. For Jesus the human being took priority over religious laws; a woman just as much as a man. As I. Howard Marshall points out, the healing of this woman exemplifies the saving power of God in delivering his people from the power of evil.<sup>1</sup>

Another very significant healing was that of the woman who for twelve years had suffered from an issue of blood. She came up behind Jesus in a crowd and touched the hem of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped.<sup>2</sup> Jesus knew

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1. I. Howard Marshall, The Gospel of Luke, (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1978), p.556.
  2. Mk 5:25,34; Mt 9:20-22; Lk 8:43-48.



that someone had touched him, and asked who it was, pressing the question until the woman fearfully came forward, and said that she had been healed. Jesus praised her for her faith, and wished her peace. He did not reprimand her for causing him to become ritually unclean.<sup>3</sup> He thus indicated that his concern for her wellbeing outweighed any concern for religious law; in this way the stigma of menstruation was removed, and the worth and importance of the woman, the person, proclaimed.<sup>4</sup>

Luke 8:2-3 also mentions other healings of women which Jesus performed. Mary Magdalen had been cured of seven demons. Joanna, Susanna, and "many others" are also mentioned. These women, as a result of their healing, accompanied Jesus on his journeying and helped to support him out of their own means. It is significant that many women whose conditions were subject to scorn and penalties within their communities found in Jesus a healer of both their physical and psychological suffering and who, in addition, accepted their company, their support and their ministering to him.

I. Howard Marshall remarks in his commentary on Luke 8:2-3, "Along with the Twelve are mentioned the women; they appear

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3. The law taught that anyone suffering from an issue of blood was ritually impure, and would defile anyone whom they touched. Thus Jesus had been made "unclean" by this touch and, by religious law, then needed to undergo a series of purification rites. Any other rabbi who had been touched in this way would probably have been angry at his defilement. But Jesus put this woman above the demands of cultic purity.

4. It is interesting to note that there was clearly something unusual about Jesus, which set him apart from other rabbis, to give the woman the faith that she could touch him and be healed. That she felt fear of his possible anger is quite clear from the gospel accounts. His love and acceptance of her was as powerful a healing for her personhood as his touch had been for her physical illness.

on the same footing as the men ... The place of women among the followers of Jesus was no doubt unusual (cf Jn 4:27) in Palestine, but this very fact speaks in favour of its historicity."<sup>5</sup>

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5. I. Howard Marshall, The Gospel of Luke, pp.316-317.

(b) The Raisings of Jesus

Jesus raised several people from the dead during his ministry. Of these raisings, two were at the request of women, and one was herself a woman, Jairus' daughter.<sup>6</sup> Jesus raised her and - clear proof of his practical concern for people - told her parents to give her something to eat. A second raising was of the son of the widow of Nain.<sup>7</sup> Jesus "gave him back to his mother" (verse 15). In raising the young man, he touched the coffin, a most defiling thing to do in terms of the religious purity law, again demonstrating his priority of human need over cultic cleanliness. He then gave him to his mother, responding to the grief of a woman who had not only lost her child but also her only son and, therefore, her only source of support as a widow in that difficult environment.

The raising of Lazarus is, of course, the most well-known of Jesus' raisings. Lazarus was the brother of Mary and Martha, close friends of Jesus whom Jesus loved. Yet, when Jesus heard

of Lazarus' sickness, he waited several days before he set out for Bethany, the village where Mary, Martha and Lazarus lived. John 11:4 explains that Jesus intended to raise Lazarus from the dead in order to proclaim God's glory so that the Son of God might be glorified through it. As Jesus approached Bethany, Martha went out to meet him; and Jesus proclaimed himself to be the resurrection and the life.

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6. Mk 5:35-43; Mt 9:23-26; Lk 8:49-56.

7. Lk 7:11-17.

Here Jesus proclaims himself to a woman. It is the only instance in the gospels where Jesus proclaims himself to be the resurrection and he chose to do it not to his twelve disciples but to a woman. This story also tells that Martha professed Jesus to be the Messiah and the Son of God, the same profession that Peter is recorded to have made in Matthew 16:16. Exactly the same words - su ei ho christos ho huios tou theou - are used in Martha's profession as in Peter's profession recorded in Matthew. This is interesting in view of the fact that there is not usually such similarity between John and the Synoptic gospels. Of added interest is the fact that, according to John, Jesus first appeared after his resurrection to Mary Magdalen, whilst Luke states that Peter was the first witness of the resurrection. Thus, there was at least one early Christian community which believed that Jesus was first proclaimed by a woman to be the resurrection and the life and that Jesus' first appearance after his resurrection was made to a woman. For the Johannine community, women played central roles in the Jesus story, and were important witnesses to that story; and this took place in a society where a woman's witness was not acceptable as evidence.

After Martha had proclaimed Jesus to be the Christ,<sup>8</sup> she called Mary, who went out and met Jesus, weeping for the death of her brother. When Jesus saw her sorrow, "he was

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8. Although Martha proclaimed Jesus as the Christ, Raymond E. Brown points out that she does not fully understand the implications of her belief; v.39 is an indication of this, showing that Martha does not yet fully realize that Jesus is life itself. Raymond E. Brown, The Gospel According to John I-XII, The Anchor Bible Series, vol.29, 2nd ed. (Gordon City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1978), p.433.

deeply moved in spirit and troubled" (v.33), and he too wept for he loved the brother and sisters. He went to the tomb, and prayed to God that the people might believe that God had sent him. And he raised Lazarus from the dead. At this, many of the people who had been to visit Mary and Martha put their faith in him.

(c) Jesus' Love for Mary and Martha

Although Jesus loved both Lazarus and his sisters, it is Mary and Martha whose relationships with Jesus are described in the gospels, and not that of Lazarus. Luke and John attest to close relationships between Jesus and Mary and Martha. They play central roles not only in the raising of Lazarus, but also in the story where Jesus instructs Mary, and where Mary anoints Jesus. These three stories make up a solid tradition of evidence of Jesus' close relationships with the two women.

Luke relates the story of the tension between Martha and Mary over their tasks whilst Jesus was visiting their home. Martha was preparing a meal whilst Mary sat at the feet of Jesus and received instruction from him. This was not a conventional role for Jewish women; it was the male disciples who sat at the rabbi's feet, whilst the women attended to the household duties. Women were not generally instructed in religious matters outside of those duties which constituted a woman's role in Jewish religion. They were not taught Torah and were not permitted to touch the scriptures. Yet Jesus allowed Mary to sit at his feet and to listen to his teaching. Martha was harrassed by the

preparations for the meal, and finally protested to Jesus; who in reply affirmed Mary's right to learn from him.

Jesus' answer is a very gentle explanation to Martha of the priority of God's teaching over wordly concerns. What is significant in this answer is Jesus' assertion of Mary's right to receive God's word, even when her social role as a woman demanded that she should be preparing a meal. Jesus vindicated Mary's right to choose to learn from him, and not be compelled, on the grounds of her sex, to work in the kitchen. He thus denied this fundamental sex-role classification and attested the priority for all people of God's word over everyday tasks. Jesus stands in this story on the side of women's full personhood and their right to choose the occupation of study. His behaviour denies a rigid role allocation according to sex. I. Howard Marshall states that 'the better part' must never be taken away from Mary, "... it is her inalienable right and possession, guaranteed by Jesus".<sup>9</sup> In defending Mary's right to a role generally denied to Jewish women at that time, Jesus was following his proclamation of human liberation. Despite Jesus' assurance, the right to study and participate fully in Christian faith has always been, and is still, denied to many women.

John tells another story of Mary, a story in which she anointed Jesus with an expensive perfume. The anointing took place, according to John, in Mary's home in Bethany. A story of a woman's anointing Jesus is told in Matthew

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9. I. Howard Marshall, The Gospel of Luke, p.454.

and Mark also; here it is also set in Bethany, but in the house of Simon the Leper, and the woman is not identified. Luke too has the story, but he does not name the town in which it occurred, nor does he name the woman, although he alone describes her as having lived a sinful life. Whether all these stories refer to one or several events is unclear. We do know, however, that a woman, perhaps Mary, had great love for Jesus which led her to anoint him with perfume and wipe his feet with her hair.<sup>10</sup> It is possible that the woman knew or sensed that Jesus was soon to die, and anointed him in recognition of his role as Messiah. In so doing, her recognition outstripped that of the disciples. Her love must have comforted Jesus in his time of trial; as Haenchen described it, hers was, "... the last act of love and charity that would be shown in this life".<sup>11</sup> Matthew and Mark finally quote Jesus as saying that wherever the gospel is preached, the woman's deed would also be told, in memory of her.

(d) Jesus and the Sinful Woman

The story of Jesus's anointing in Luke 7:36-50 is so different from the other three accounts that it requires separate comment. It is not clear as to the relationship of these various anointing stories, as it is possible to

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10. Matthew 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-9, and John 12:1-8 all describe this event and recount that one or more of the disciples became angry with the woman involved, saying that the perfume should rather have been sold and the money given to the poor. In these three accounts, Jesus then tells the disciples to leave her alone; and Matthew and Mark quote Jesus as saying that the woman had done a beautiful thing.

11. Ernst Haenchen, John I : A Commentary on the Gospel of John, Chapters 1-6, trans. Robert W. Fink, (ed.) Robert W. Fink with Ulrich Busse, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p.87.

see the Bethany story as distinct from the story in Luke, or to see the two as two versions of the same story. However, the Lucan story has a somewhat different message from that of Matthew, Mark and John. In Luke, Jesus was the dinner guest of a Pharisee. During the meal a "sinful woman" entered the room and anointed his feet with perfume, weeping, and wiping his feet with her hair. It is not clear whether Jesus knew this woman, but there is no doubt that she knew of his forgiving and redeeming message, and felt in need of it. Her sin is not mentioned, but with few options available to women at the time, and with the fact that her hair was loose, it was probably that of prostitution. The double standards of morality dictated that the woman was an outcast, although her clients were not penalized. Jesus in contrast accepted the woman and forgave her sins, to the disapproval of his host. Francis W. Beare points out that the story becomes a contrast of the repentant woman of the streets with the censorious Pharisee.<sup>12</sup> Jesus' forgiveness liberated this woman to a new life, a life that the Pharisee did not understand.

(e) The Adulterous Woman

The new life Jesus offered is constantly evident in his encounters with women. One of the most powerful of these encounters is that which took place with the woman caught in adultery, told in John 8:1-11.\* In this incident Jesus'

\* Although this pericope is not found in the earliest manuscripts, it is included in the King James Bible and is thus part of the Anglican scriptures.

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12. Francis W. Beare, The Gospel According to Matthew, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), p.505.



primary concern was with the spiritual poverty of the woman's accusers. Jesus did not condone the adultery, but even less did he condone the accusers' self-righteous and vicious use of a helpless woman to trap him in a legal debate. He cut through all the religious definitions of sin to show the sin in their hearts. None of them could deny their sin, and they all left. In the end, only Jesus and the woman remained. He asked her if anyone had condemned her. She replied to the contrary. "Then neither do I condemn you", Jesus said. "Go now and leave your life of sin" (verse 11). Jesus clearly regarded adultery as sinful. He turned the woman towards a new life, not by condemning her, but by refusing to condemn her, and expecting her in return to forsake her sin. Jesus offered her forgiveness and a new chance of life, just as he had offered these to the "sinful" woman in Luke and to many others.

In this story, Jesus does not condemn the woman for her sin. Instead he turns the judgment upon her (male) accusers. Jesus obviously has no time for the double standard so evident in this story. He offers to both the men and to the woman a new understanding and a new life.

#### (f) Jesus and Widows

Jesus' deep concern for the weak members of society is perhaps most clearly shown in his attitude to widows. Throughout Jewish history the prophets had consistently tried to defend the widow from oppression and

exploitation at the hands of society. Jesus continued this tradition. He publically condemned, and most vehemently, the teachers of the law who made a show of lengthy prayers, and liked to receive honour from the community, yet who proceeded to "devour widow's houses".<sup>13</sup> After his condemnation of the religious leaders, Jesus pointed out a poor widow who was putting two small coins into the temple treasury.<sup>14</sup> He praised her warmly for giving more than anyone else for, whilst the others had given from their surplus, she had given all that she had to live on. Jesus found this poor woman's gift to be the greatest of all, and he held her up as an example of total giving. As William L. Lane observes, the woman's sacrifice of all she had illustrates the elements of true discipleship - total trust in, and surrender to God.<sup>15</sup> I. Howard Marshall points out that the poor widow gave away what little she had to support life. If the leaders of religion scorned and exploited such people, it followed that the system was ready for judgment. Marshall believes that it was no accident that the prophecy of the destruction of the temple follows this passage in Luke.<sup>16</sup>

#### (g) Jesus and Prostitutes

Although widows were weak members of society and held in low esteem, the very lowest and most depised of human beings in Jesus' society were the prostitutes. It is witness, therefore, to the amazing nature of Jesus' message to

13. Lk 20:45-47; Mk 12:38-40.

14. Lk 21:1-4; Mk 12:41-44.

15. William L. Lane, The Gospel According to Mark, (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1974), p.443.

16. I. Howard Marshall, The Gospel of Luke, p.752.

observe that Jesus not only reached out in his teaching to these women, but promised them a place in the Kingdom of Heaven. Matthew 21:31 records Jesus as speaking with the chief priests and elders of the temple. He rebukes them for not following the preaching of John the Baptist, and tells them that the prostitutes and the tax collectors, who received John's message, were entering the Kingdom ahead of themselves, for they, the priests and elders, did not repent and believe. In Jesus' eyes the sins of the powerful far outweighed the sins of prostitutes and tax collectors. This attitude amounted to a reversal of current beliefs.

It is quite clear from the gospel stories thus far discussed that Jesus did not follow the socially correct attitude toward women. In a society where men hesitated to speak to their own wives in public, Jesus' relationships with women were open and free. He accepted the attentions of prostitutes, was friends with Mary and Martha, spoke with women in the street, healed them on the Sabbath and exhibited deep concern over their suffering and their oppression. And Jesus went even further than that. He taught women his message as freely as he taught men, and he declared his Messiahship to them. And he taught not only Hebrew women, but Samaritan women as well.

#### (h) Jesus and the Samaritan Woman

Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well, described in John 4, is an enlightening account of his revolutionary attitude to women. In this incident Jesus chose to preach to the woman, revealing himself to her as the Messiah. This is the first time, according to John,

that Jesus had thus clearly revealed himself, and he did so to a foreigner and a woman. Furthermore, Jesus sent the woman to witness to him. As F.F. Bruce points out, "But for the woman's witness, her fellow townsfolk would never have come to know Jesus".<sup>17</sup>

This story indicates Jesus' complete disregard for Jewish customs regarding women and foreigners. He spoke to a foreign woman, possibly drank from her water jar, preached to her, revealed himself to her as the Messiah and, perhaps most significant of all, used her as a witness and an evangelist for his message. For this woman was an evangelist. It was on her word that many first believed in Jesus. Raymond Brown points out that John described both this woman and the male disciples as bearing witness to Jesus and bringing people to believe in him on the strength of their word.<sup>18</sup> Jesus thus unquestionably used the Samaritan woman as his evangelist to her village, and enabled her to proclaim him so that many believed in him. She is the first evangelist of John's Gospel.

(i) Jesus and the Syro-Phoenician Woman

If a foreign woman was an evangelist sent by Jesus, a foreign woman was also the one to demand that Jesus bring his salvation to the Gentiles. This was the Syro-Phoenician woman.<sup>19</sup> Her story has several interesting points. Very striking is the fact that the woman is successful in her debate with Jesus; she is vindicated in her request and it

17. F.F. Bruce, The Gospel of John, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973), p.116.

18. Raymond E. Brown, Roles of Women in the Fourth Gospel, (Theological Studies, December 1975), p.691.

19. Mt 15:22-28; Mk 7:24-30.

is granted. Few people in the gospels who engaged in a debate with Jesus proved their point, as did this foreign woman. The question then arises as to whether Jesus' disparaging attitude to Gentiles was assumed for the purpose of testing the woman's faith and for demonstrating to the disciples his rejection of prejudice toward others, or whether Jesus himself experienced uncertainty as to how far his mission extended.

A support for the latter theory can be found in his instructions to the Twelve. His sending of the Twelve in Matthew 10:5 states explicitly that they were not to go to the Gentiles or the Samaritans, but to the "lost sheep of Israel"; the same phrase he uses in conversation with the woman.

If the first hypothesis is correct, then the woman passed the test with great success. And if the second is closer to the truth, then this foreign woman's insight and wisdom was instrumental in leading Jesus to the realization that God wanted him to offer salvation to the whole world. Either way this story describes a faithful and courageous woman whom Jesus affirmed and praised.

#### (j) Jesus and the Woman in the Crowd

The final example in our discussion of an encounter between Jesus and a woman is recorded in Luke 11:27-28. Jesus was teaching a crowd when a woman in the crowd called out: "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you" (verse 27). Jesus' reply is definite: "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it" (verse 28). Jesus is here very clearly setting forth the priorities of

life. For both men and women, the most important activity in life is to hear the word of God and obey it. All other occupations are secondary, including even that of motherhood. Yet wifedom and motherhood were, for Jesus' female contemporaries, the only socially approved option in life. But Jesus clearly did not see wifedom and motherhood as the sole activities of women divinely ordained. On the contrary, he allowed women who were wives and mothers to travel with him and minister to him.<sup>20</sup> For women as much as men, the priority was obedience to God's word, whatever this might involve; there is no record that Jesus ever preached to women about their roles of wifedom and motherhood.

## 2. Jesus' Teachings on Women

We turn now to Jesus' teachings concerning women. We have observed his interactions with women to be entirely free of the contempt and devaluation found in the writings and sayings of the rabbis of his time. Jesus' behaviour towards women was revelatory of God's love. It stands in startling contrast to the behaviour of his fellow men towards women, both in his own time, and during the centuries of Christendom that followed. And his teachings exemplify the same attitude towards women as do his actions.

### (a) Adultery

Jesus spoke directly to the male sin of lusting after women. He taught that, "anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has

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20. Lk 8:1-3; Mk 15:40-41; Mt 27:55-56.

already committed adultery with her in his heart".<sup>21</sup> This passage is concerned primarily with the teaching that sin arises in the human heart and mind and thus to look with a view to adultery is in itself an adulterous act. However, it has clear implications for men's attitude to women. It indicates that reducing a woman to a sex object is sinful and this, in turn, necessitates respect for women as human beings with human rights.<sup>22</sup>

(b) Divorce

Jesus' teaching on divorce was another radical stance in support of women's dignity and rights. Divorce was a man's prerogative in Judaism. It could be initiated only by the man.<sup>23</sup> And a man could divorce his wife for trivial reasons; according to Hillel, for spoiling a dish; according to Akiba, if she was less beautiful than another woman. In reaction to this, Jesus appealed to God's original institution of marriage but not of divorce, and he upheld the right of a faithful wife not to be divorced.<sup>24</sup> In this teaching, Jesus accorded both wife and husband the same responsibilities and rights in marriage. As Marshall points out, in this passage Jesus places husband and wife on the same level, and condemns

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21. Mt 5:28.

22. Interestingly, he does not warn women not to look upon men with lust. This is not to indicate that if a woman were to do so, she would not too have committed a sin. But in Jesus' time, the abuses of sexuality were presumably so overwhelmingly on the male side that Jesus directed his reproof directly upon the sin and exploitation that he saw.

23. Leonard Swidler, Biblical Affirmations of Woman, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1979), pp.195-196.

24. Mt 5:31-32; Mt 19:3-12; Mk 10:2-12; Lk 16:18.

equally the breaking of the marriage bond by either partner.<sup>25</sup> William Lane agrees:

This sharp intensifying of the concept of adultery had the effect of elevating the status of the wife to the same dignity as her husband, and placed the husband under an obligation of fidelity.<sup>26</sup>

One thing common to Jesus' teaching on lust and divorce is the absence of the double-standard discriminating against women.<sup>27</sup> He clearly upheld the equal dignity and rights of women in marriage and must have been unpopular among his male auditors - his disciples were certainly not pleased with this teaching (Mt 19:10). His teaching in Matthew 19:4-6 and Mark 10:6-9 also upheld monogamy over against polygamy which the Old Testament permitted. It demanded a closer and more loving relationship along the lines of Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:24.<sup>28</sup>

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25. I. Howard Marshall, The Gospel of Luke, p.631.

26. William L. Lane, The Gospel According to Mark, p.357.

27. As L. Swidler, Biblical Affirmations of Woman, p.175 points out, in Jewish practice at that time, adultery could, in fact, be committed only against a husband. Sex between an unmarried woman and a husband was not adultery against his wife, although sex between a wife and another man was adultery against her husband, and deserved the death penalty. Yet Jesus here speaks of adultery against a wife. This was a revolutionary concept, indicating the equality in the marriage relationship which Jesus prescribed, both of rights and of duties.

28. It is most significant that Jesus in his discourse on God's creation of marriage appealed to the priestly narrative of Genesis 1:27, where male and female are created together with no indication of the subordination that the rib story has always been understood to suggest. From Genesis 2, Jesus drew only from verse 24, which stresses the love and equality in marriage when the two become one flesh. Jesus thus never hinted at subordination and double-standards in marriage. And he clearly saw husband and wife as both equally responsible for the marriage or its failure.



(c) The Autonomy of Women

Another passage which indicates Jesus' belief in the autonomous personhood of women is the one in which the Sadducees questioned him about a woman who had had seven husbands. At the resurrection, they asked, whose wife would she be?<sup>29</sup> Jesus' answer refutes the assumption underlying the question; that a woman was defined by her relationship to a man. He states that, at the end of history, there would be no marriage, for each person would be like the angels in heaven. Although the Sadducees saw the woman in question solely in terms of her wifely relationship to her husband, Jesus saw her as a unique human being who would enter the Kingdom as such.

(d) Jesus' Rejection of Dominance and Inequality

Jesus never stated that women were inferior to men or that women were intended by God to be subordinate to men. In fact, we have very good evidence that Jesus looked upon structures of domination and inequality with abhorrence. He was forthright in his rejection of any attempt of men or women to obtain high status in the kingdom. Thus, when the mother of James and John requested him to place her sons at his left or right hands in his Kingdom, he rejected the request. Instead he taught his disciples that whoever wanted to be great must be a servant, as he himself was a servant.<sup>30</sup>

Jesus here rejects concepts of dominance and high position, and seeks to overturn this structure of thought and replace

29. Mt 22:23-30; Mk 12:18-27; Lk 20:27-28.

30. Mt 20:20-28; Mk 10:35-45; Mk 9:33-37; Lk 22:24-27.

it with one of service and humility. He does this again and again in different contexts. In his teaching concerning the leaders of Judaism, the teachers of the law and the Pharisees, he again commands humility and servanthood.<sup>31</sup> And he condemns the hierarchical, leadership-dominated structure of the religious community, commanding his followers not to adopt it (a command the church has never obeyed!).

(e) The End of the World

Jesus told a number of stories describing the end of the world. A striking aspect of these stories is their sexual parallelism: a story featuring men is told, and then a similar story featuring women. An example is in Matthew 24:39-41, of two men in the field, and two women grinding. Luke makes a similar pairing in 17:34-36. The same parallelism concerning the end of the world occurs again in Matthew 24:45-51, with the story of the faithful and dishonest servants, and Matthew 25:1-13, with the story of the wise and foolish virgins. The coming of the Kingdom of Heaven is also illustrated with parallel stories of men and women: the man sowing mustard seed, and the woman mixing leaven with flour.<sup>32</sup> These pairings make the clear point that both men and women will enter the Kingdom; and both men and women will be excluded from it. The ultimate distinction between human beings - those saved and those lost - will not be founded upon sex, despite Revelations 14:4! There is, thus, no ultimate importance in the sex

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31. Mt 23:8-12.

32. Mt 13:31-33.

distinction; ultimate importance, as Jesus often stated, lay in learning the will of God and obeying it.

(f) Jesus' Use of Feminine Symbolism for God

The most important of the parallel stories occurred when Jesus was teaching a group of tax collectors and sinners, and was criticized for this by the Pharisees. In reply he told them three parables, all describing God's concern over a lost sinner and God's joy when this sinner repents. In the first parable, God is imaged as a shepherd; in the third as the father of the prodigal son. But in the second parable, God is imaged as a woman, searching for a lost coin. Jesus did not hesitate to liken God to both a man and a woman. He clearly told these sexually parallel stories for a purpose, and it is not unreasonable to suppose that a part of that purpose was to emphasize that women too are made in the image of God, and women too will dwell with God in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus did not only image God as a woman. He also applied a female image to himself. In Luke 13:34 and in Matthew 23:37, Jesus likens himself to a hen longing to gather her chicks under her wing, as he grieved for the fate of Jerusalem. Marshall suggests a link between the Old Testament image of Wisdom, and this saying.<sup>33</sup> Since Wisdom has a feminine personification, this is another instance of Jesus using feminine symbolism with regard to himself.

Jesus' statement in John 7:37-38 also casts him in a female image. He said that if anyone were thirsty, they should go

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33. I. Howard Marshall, The Gospel of Luke, p.574.

to him and drink. The idea of drinking from a human being could at that time only have been associated with a woman; firstly with a mother's breasts and, secondly, with the contemporary role of women as the one who fetched water for the household. Men did not perform this task.

### 3. Women Disciples

It is evident from the Gospels that Jesus had a group of disciples who travelled about with him, listening to his teaching and sharing his life. This group included a number of women, who left home and family to travel with a rabbi - an astonishing breach of custom which Jesus was evidently prepared to permit. Quite a number of these women are named. Mary of Magdala is named by all three Synoptic Gospels.<sup>34</sup> Luke refers to Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward, Chuza, and to Susanna.<sup>35</sup> Matthew and Mark also mention several other women: Salome, Mary the mother of James the Younger and of Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.<sup>36</sup> That the early Christians thought of these and other women as disciples is indicated in several early apocryphal documents. Swidler quotes from the Sophia Jesu Christi, probably written during the second century, which mentions seven holy women as disciples.

After he had risen from the dead, when they came, the twelve disciples (matheties) and seven women who had followed him as disciples (matheteuein), into Galilee ..... there appeared to them the Redeemer.<sup>37</sup>

Another source which Swidler quotes is the early third-century document, the Pistis Sophia,<sup>38</sup> in which Jesus states that Mary Magdalen would surpass all his disciples:

34. Mk 15:40-41; Mt 27:55-56; Lk 8:1-3.

35. Lk 8:1-3.

36. Mk 15:40-41; Mt 27:55-56.

37. Leonard Swidler, Biblical Affirmations of Woman, pp.195-196.

38. Leonard Swidler, ibid., p.196.

But Mary Magdalen and John, the maiden (parthenos), will surpass all my disciples (mathetai), and all men who shall receive mysteries in the Ineffable, they will be on my right hand and on my left, and I am they and they are I.

There is no question that it was Jesus' women disciples and followers who remained loyal to him during his trial and crucifixion when the men fled in fear. Matthew 26:56 tells how all the disciples deserted Jesus and ran away from him when he was arrested. Mark 14:49 corroborates this. However, Luke states that those who knew Jesus stood at a distance and watched the crucifixion, and John describes the disciple whom Jesus loved standing at the foot of the cross. Thus it is unclear if all the male disciples deserted Jesus or if a few remained. However, there is no doubt that the women were with Jesus throughout his suffering. Luke's Gospel tells how a number of women met Jesus on the Via Dolorosa as he was carrying his cross to the place of execution. These women openly mourned for him, although it may have been dangerous to do so. There is no record of any male followers of Jesus lamenting for him publically. Jesus' response to the women was typical of his love, showing more concern for them than for himself.<sup>39</sup>

These women, including his mother and Mary of Magdala, remained with Jesus throughout his crucifixion, according to all four gospels.<sup>40</sup> John describes how Jesus' concern for women remained constant even at the end of his life. Seeing his mother at the foot of the cross and the beloved disciple standing near her, Jesus commended his mother into the care

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39. Lk 23:26-32.

40. Mk 15:40-41; Mt 27:55-56; Lk 23:49; Jn 19:25-27.

of this disciple, and it is recorded that the disciple made a place for her in his home. Clearly Mary must at that stage have been a widow, or perhaps have been separated from her husband and sons who would normally support her. But even in his great suffering, Jesus was concerned for her vulnerable position and took care that she would be looked after.

#### 4. The First Witnesses of the Resurrection

The women were still with Jesus when he was taken from the cross and buried, and they took note of where he was laid. They then prepared ointments and spices, and after the Sabbath, they set out to anoint his body. Perhaps it was because of their continuing concern for Jesus, even after his death, that they were privileged to be the first witnesses of the empty tomb and of the resurrected Jesus. Although women's testimony in those days was not acceptable evidence, all four gospels record the women's witness of the empty tomb and/or of the risen Jesus. According to Matthew, Mary of Magdala and "the other Mary" discovered the empty tomb and were told by the Angel of the Lord of Jesus' resurrection. The angel then sent them to tell the other disciples that Jesus was risen from the dead. These women were thus the first apostles - ones sent (apostoloi) by God through his angel to bear witness to Jesus' resurrection.<sup>41</sup>

Mark gives a similar account although, according to this gospel, the women did not witness to the other disciples as they had been asked to do. However, the women must

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41. Mt 28:1-8.

eventually have carried out their witness or how did the story of the empty tomb and the angel's instructions to the women ever become known? This account of the resurrection story is clearly incomplete. Luke, too, records the discovery by the women of the empty tomb. He describes two angels telling the women of Jesus' resurrection, but in this account the angels did not instruct the women to witness to the other disciples. The women, however, did so, but the other disciples did not believe them, and Peter went himself to the tomb and saw the empty burial clothes. In John's account, Mary of Magdala witnessed the empty tomb. She hastened to tell Simon Peter and the beloved disciple, who went and witnessed it for themselves. Thus, in all four gospels, it was the women who first discovered the empty tomb and, according to Matthew and Mark, were sent by God's angel to witness to Jesus' resurrection to the other disciples.

Three out of the four gospels report that the first appearance of the risen Jesus was to Mary of Magdala or to a group of women disciples. It is strange, therefore, that Paul in I Corinthians 15:5-8 described Jesus as having appeared first to Peter and secondly to the Twelve, and makes no mention of the strong tradition in which women were the first witnesses of the resurrection. Probably this can be accounted for by the fact that Paul's message would have carried little weight to his male auditors if it's primary witness had been a woman. F.F. Bruce remarks on this passage that the early church remembered that Mary Magdalen,



... was the first witness of the risen Christ, preceding even Peter in this regard. If her witness nevertheless was not stressed (as Peter's was) in the primitive preaching, this was probably because a woman's testimony was of little public account. Celsus, the anti-Christian polemicist of the later second century, dismisses the resurrection narrative as based on the hallucination of a 'hysterical woman'!.<sup>42</sup>

At all events, the oral traditions that created Matthew, Mark and John all attested the fact that Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalen, and Matthew adds that Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalen and 'the other Mary'. In this account, Jesus himself sent the women to witness to him; the women were made apostles by Jesus.

In Mark's account, Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalen only. Likewise, John's account depicts Jesus as appearing first to Mary Magdalen alone. It is very similar to Mark's but with more detail. Thus, Matthew, Mark and John all testify that Jesus made his first resurrection appearance to a woman or women; and Matthew and John state furthermore that Jesus sent the woman or women to witness to his resurrection to the disciples. The Markan account is very brief and may well imply the same sending that Matthew and John make explicit. It is only Luke who does not mention Jesus' appearance to Mary Magdalen and possibly another woman. However, it is interesting to note that Luke does not give a clear account as to whom Jesus appeared first. He tells the story of Jesus' appearance to two disciples on the Emmaus Road,<sup>43</sup> but when these disciples returned to Jerusalem they found the Eleven and others assembled together declaring

42. F.F. Bruce, The Gospel of John, p.384.

43. Lk 24:13-31.

that Jesus had appeared to Peter. However, from Paul's account in I Corinthians 15:5-8, there was clearly a tradition which placed the appearance to Peter first. This also tallies with Mark's account of Jesus' second appearance to "two of them while they were walking in the country".<sup>44</sup> Thus it is probable that for both Luke and Paul, the priority given to Peter was a priority among those who were accepted as being the official witnesses to the resurrection. The social structures and attitudes of the time would not have enabled a woman to be acceptable as an important official witness.

Raymond E. Brown<sup>45</sup> points out that the two Pauline requirements for apostleship were having seen the risen Jesus and having been sent to proclaim him; this is clear from I Corinthians 9:1-2, I Corinthians 15:8-11 and Galatians 1:11-16. A significant element in Peter's priority in the early church was the tradition that he was the first to see the risen Jesus (I Cor 15:5; Lk 24:34). But Mary Magdalen has three Gospels' witness to her being the first to see the risen Lord; and was sent to proclaim him by an angel in Mark, by Jesus in John, and by both in Matthew. It would appear then that Mary Magdalen's lack of

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44. Mk 16:12.

45. Raymond E. Brown, Roles of Women in the Fourth Gospel, Theological Studies, December 1975, p.696.

real importance in the recorded history of the early church and her constant distortion as a sinner and a prostitute by the church throughout Christian history, may well be due to the fact that she was a woman.\*

##### 5. Mary Magdalen

There was clearly a very strong tradition in the early church that the risen Jesus had appeared first to Mary Magdalen and for this reason she held a place of honour in the early Christian community. This place of honour is attested to by a number of scholars of the early centuries. Leonard Swidler refers to a number of these.<sup>46</sup> Hippolytus of Rome, writing at the turn of

\* There is no clear reason to identify Mary Magdalen with the sinful woman of Luke 7:37-50 or with Mary of Bethany. Yet in the tradition of the church this has been done, and the net effect has been to discredit her as a sinner and thus make her unworthy to hold a prominent position in the history of the church and in the calendar of the saints.

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46. Leonard Swidler, Biblical Affirmations of Women, p.208.

the second century, commented on Jesus' appearing first to Mary Magdalen and spoke of her as an apostle and an evangelist sent by Christ. In the ninth century Rabanus Maurus wrote a life of Mary

Magdalen in which he states that Jesus commissioned her as an apostle to the apostles. She carried out the office of the apostolate, and evangelized her fellow disciples with the news of the resurrection of the Messiah. Thus Mary Magdalen was raised to the honour of the apostolate and was commissioned an evangelist of the resurrection. And, in the twelfth century, Bernard of Clairvaux referred to Mary Magdalen as the apostle to the apostles.<sup>47</sup>

Furthermore, side by side with this tradition, Swidler mentions an early apocryphal tradition which similarly attests to the importance of Mary Magdalen for primitive Christianity.<sup>48</sup> The apocryphal Gospel of Peter, written probably in the late first century or the early second century, specifically names Mary Magdalen as a woman disciple of Jesus, and describes her and her women friends' discovery of the empty tomb and the witness of the angel to them concerning Jesus' resurrection. Likewise in the Letter of the Apostles, also probably an early second century composition, Mary Magdalen and two other women were the first to find the empty tomb and to see Jesus. On Jesus' commission Mary Magdalen then went to witness to the male disciples, who refused to believe her. She returned and told Jesus of their unbelief, and Jesus then sent another

47. See Leonard Swidler, Biblical Affirmations of Woman, pp.209-210.

48. Ibid., pp.205-206.

woman to witness to the men. They refused to believe her also, and she too returned and told Jesus of their recalcitrance. Finally Jesus and the women all went to the male disciples, to convince them of the truth of the women's witness. It is interesting in this story to note the stress being placed on the male disciples' refusal to accept the witness of the women. Possibly this emphasis could have been an oblique criticism of the restrictions placed on women in the church and the dominance of men in the church leadership.

A similar emphasis on the witness of the women and the unbelief of the men disciples is made in a Gnostic Christian document, the Gospel of Mani, a product of the Manichean sect.<sup>49</sup> This was probably written in the third or fourth century, and a portion of what is still extant deals with Jesus' appearance to Mary Magdalen. This stresses the need for Mary Magdalen to witness to the wandering and confused disciples and to bring them back to Jesus. Mary Magdalen is referred to as the shepherd to the male disciples who were the sheep; even Peter is placed under Mary's guidance. The emphasis on female leadership and guidance is extremely strong.

However, along with this tradition, Swidler points out that there are also early indications that Mary Magdalen's position of power and honour in the early church was not going unchallenged. The apocryphal Gospel of Mary, probably a second century Gnostic Christian document, describes a

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49. Ibid., p.207.

strong jealousy of Mary Magdalen among the male disciples in which they attacked her for thinking that she, a woman, could understand Jesus' will more clearly than they could.<sup>50</sup>

According to this document, a tradition existed which believed that Mary had a closer relationship with Jesus than did the male disciples. A similar statement is made in a third century Gnostic document, the Gospel of Philip. Here Mary Magdalen is said to have been called the companion of Jesus, loved by Christ more than all his disciples. It is even said that Jesus used to kiss her on the mouth - this would in Gnosticism have had a spiritual significance rather than a physical one, and indicates the intimacy which the writers of the Gospel believed to have existed between Mary and Jesus.<sup>51</sup>

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50. Ibid., p.211.

51. The disciples' jealousy of Mary Magdalen's position is recorded not only in the Gospels of Philip and Mary, but also in a number of other documents. In the second century apocryphal document, the Kerymata Petrou, Peter is described as saying deeply critical and contemptuous things about women prophets. They are described as vastly inferior to men prophets, and as thieves and distorters of male prophecy. Interestingly, they are further described as hoping to become something which contradicts their nature and thus they destroy what they have. A similar hostility towards women in leadership positions, and especially towards Mary Magdalen, is expressed by Peter in the Gnostic document, the Pistis Sophia, written in the early third century, and also in the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas. In this Gospel, Peter expresses a desire to excommunicate Mary Magdalen because she is a woman. (See Leonard Swidler, Biblical Affirmations of Woman, pp.213-214). The misogyny that Peter is expressing clearly reflects a gradual anti-feminist development within the Christian community of the first few centuries. Peter's hostility to Mary and Mary's assertion of her true apostleship and right to preach and prophesy are probably evidence of a vital debate in the early church as to whether or not women could be legitimate transmitters of apostolic revelation and tradition. The solution often offered appears to point to celibacy. Women could rise to the level of men by denying their female sexuality and living as "male". Thus, in the third century, there are clear indications

The many evidences of a strong tradition honouring Mary Magdalen and the other women for their role in the Christ point clearly to the importance of these women in Jesus' life, death and resurrection and in the founding of the church. It is most significant that Jesus appeared first to women. Jesus was a Jew learned in the law, and there is no doubt that he must have been aware of the legal inability of women to serve as witnesses. His decision to appear first to the women and to send them to bear witness to his other disciples indicates conclusively his love and respect for these women. He honoured them above all when he chose to reveal the most important event of his mission to them - his resurrection.

Thus an examination of Jesus' behaviour and teaching concerning women as reflected in the gospels reveals the fact that Jesus expresses a strongly affirmative attitude towards women. Unlike the rabbis of his day, he makes no derogatory statements about women. Unlike the men of his day, he speaks to and interacts with women freely and on terms of respect. If Jesus' behaviour towards women had been reflective of the general social situation of this time, it would be unremarkable. But we know that the dominant attitude maintained that women were vastly inferior to men. In this light the cumulative significance of Jesus' affirmative and respectful behaviour towards women is great.

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both of the misogyny of the church fathers that led to a serious devaluing of women; and of the "escape route" for women which celibacy offered, opening up possibilities of leadership and authority for women in convents and abbeys.

The fact that the general negative attitude concerning women is not reflected in the Gospels at all indicates most clearly the value and respect Jesus expressed for women and taught his followers to express.



## II ACTS AND THE EPISTLES

Despite the importance of the three gospels' witness to the women's priority in seeing the risen Jesus, Christian tradition has tended to concentrate on the Pauline account of Peter's priority in this regard, as given in I Corinthians 15:1-7. The fact that the Pauline tradition, stressing Jesus' appearance to men only, has been preferred to the Gospel tradition stressing the women's centrality in the resurrection, is an important one. The preference for a male-oriented tradition is obvious in a male-dominated and misogynistic church. But there is a great deal of evidence for the Gospel's account of the resurrection. The Gospels preserved the tradition even although it could not be used as a convincing witness, as could the Pauline tradition. For three Gospels to have preserved this tradition, despite its inability to bear witness points to its authenticity. Furthermore, it is stretching credulity to argue that a male-oriented church would invent a female-oriented tradition if there was already to hand an authentic male one such as the Pauline account. It is most probable that, while the early church was aware of the appearance of Jesus first to women, they concentrated on Jesus' appearance to men in order to have evidence to the credible witnesses to their claim that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Orr and Walther<sup>52</sup> suggest that Paul in I Corinthians 15:1-7 was stressing well-known leader figures in the church. He

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52. W.F. Orr and J.A. Walther, I Corinthians, p.363.

also stressed the weight of members of the witnesses. However, he did not use the women's tradition as they could not be acceptable in his evidence of witness.

### 1. Women in the Early Church

Jesus' revolutionary attitude towards women was not entirely lost after his death. Although the remainder of the New Testament does not equal the gospels' record of making no negative statements about women, there does continue a considerable degree of respect and acceptance of women. Of this, surely the most significant example must be the equal acceptance and belonging experienced by both women and men converts to Christianity. Unlike the Semitic practice whereby only males participate in the intimate covenant of circumcision, both women and men experienced baptism into the new Christian community. A second example is the presence of women throughout the beginnings of Christianity. They were with the male disciples in the upper room in Jerusalem after Jesus' ascension.<sup>53</sup> Both men and women received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and prophesied as the prophet Joel had predicted. The quotation from Joel which Peter recites makes it absolutely clear that both men and women were to receive the Holy Spirit and to prophesy; and both men and women did so receive and prophesy. Both Ananias and Sapphira sinned against the Holy Spirit and paid the full punishment of death as a result. Acts 5:14 states that more and more men and women were steadily converted to Christianity. Both men and women were persecuted by Saul and taken to prison by him.<sup>54</sup> Once converted, Paul preached

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53. Acts 1:14.

54. Acts 8:3, 9:12, 22:4-5.

the gospel freely to men and women. At Philippi he preached to groups made up exclusively of women, and a member of his audience, Lydia, became one of his first converts.

Women were not only converts to Christianity; they became co-evangelists and co-workers in the spreading and administrating of Christianity. Priscilla is prominent among these women. Together with her husband, Aquila, she is mentioned six times in the New Testament, and four out of the six times she is named first. Paul met Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth, and lodged with them.<sup>55</sup> The three later travelled together to Ephesus. Paul then travelled further, but Priscilla and Aquila remained in Ephesus, where they met Apollos. It is recorded in Acts 18:25 that Apollos was not fully versed in the faith, and Priscilla and Aquila invited him to their home and instructed him. This is an instance of a woman who taught a man the faith, and there is no evidence that Paul disapproved of this. Indeed, in Romans 16:3-5, Paul referred to Priscilla and Aquila as co-workers in Christ and indicated that they were active in saving his life at the risk of their own.

Priscilla is greeted by name in three epistles: Romans 16:3; I Corinthians 16:19 and 2 Timothy 4:19, a sign of her prominence in Paul's mission and in the early church. Her evident importance in the early church and her teaching of the gospel to Apollos reveals the scope of women's activity in early Christianity. It has even been postulated that Priscilla was the anonymous author of the Letter to the

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55. Acts 18:1-3.

Hebrews. John Chrysostom, not generally very favourable to women, believed that the fact that Priscilla was greeted before Aquila indicated a greater degree of piety in her. So great was her piety that she was able to instruct Apollos and make of him a brilliant teacher.<sup>56</sup> Orr and Walther infer from I Corinthians 16:19 that Priscilla "... was a person of outstanding qualities in Christian leadership and service".<sup>57</sup>

Priscilla was not the only woman to host a church at her house. Mary, the mother of John Mark, was probably another.<sup>58</sup> The reference in I Corinthians 1:11 to Chloe's people is quite possibly another example. Lydia hosted the new church in Phillippi,<sup>59</sup> and Nympha's house was the venue for the church at Laodicea, as is stated in Colossians 4:15.

Priscilla, Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa and Persis are commended by Paul in Romans 16 for having laboured hard in the Lord. Paul refers to Priscilla specifically as a co-worker in Romans 16:3. In Phillipians 4:2 he states that Euodia and Syntyche have contended at his side. Both these statements indicate that Paul considers these women as his equals, not as his subordinates. He never states that these women have worked for him or under him, but rather with him at his side. His attitude to them was consistently one of respect, gratitude and, in many cases, affection. There is no hint of the patriarchal structure of hierarchical male

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56. Leonard Swidler, Biblical Affirmations of Woman, p.298.

57. W.F. Orr and J.A. Walther, I Corinthians, p.364.

58. Acts 12:12.

59. Acts 16:15,40.

dominance and female submission which characterises the Deutero-Pauline texts referring to women. Furthermore, when Paul does request submission, it is to those who work for the Lord, and not to the male sex. In I Corinthians 16:15-16 Paul requests submission to people such as the household of Stephanas, whom he describes as having devoted themselves to the service of the saints.

Such a request must surely include submission to those women who Paul had already mentioned by name as his co-workers who laboured hard in the Lord. Thus here his request for submission is made not on the grounds of sex, but on the grounds of labouring in the Lord's work. Women as well as men are eligible to receive submission on these grounds. But it is clear that such submission would not involve oppression, loss of dignity and suffering, as the simplistic demand for women's submission to men on the sole grounds of their sex has always involved. Rather, this type of submission is exactly along the lines of the humble servanthood required by Jesus of his followers. It typifies Jesus' own loving acceptance of repentant people and his desire to serve them.

Thus Priscilla, Chloe, Lydia, Nympha, Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa and Persis were clearly all prominent women in the early church, workers for the spreading of the gospel. Another such woman was Tabitha. She is described in Acts 9:36 as a disciple who was always doing good and helping the poor. She was so deeply valued by the community that when she died they sent for Peter, who raised her from the dead.

The fact that Tabitha is specifically termed a disciple is important, for it indicates that this title was definitely applied to women as well as to men. Women are not excluded from the honour of discipleship to Christ because of their sex.

Even more importantly, in Romans 16:7 Paul refers to a certain Junia as an outstanding apostle. Many scholars attempt to argue that Junia is in fact Junias, a short form of a very uncommon male name; however, on strict grounds of probability, it is more likely that the name Junia (some early manuscripts have 'Julia') is exactly as it appears, a popular woman's name of that time. Powerful evidence for the argument that Junia was a woman is the fact that until as late as the thirteenth century, commentators on the text interpreted the name to be that of a woman. Even the misogynist John Crysostom stated:

Oh, how great is the devotion of this woman that she should be counted worthy of the appellation of apostle.<sup>60</sup>

C.H. Dodd concurs: "We may note that the second name may equally well be the feminine "Junia". In that case, Andronicus and Junia would be husband and wife working together as missionaries, like Aquila and Priscilla. Chrystostom ... saw no difficulty in a woman apostle; nor need we".<sup>61</sup> Oregon of Alexandria, Jerome, Hatto of Vercelli, Theophylact and Peter Abelard all understood Junia

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60. Quoted by Leonard Swidler, Biblical Affirmations of Woman, p.299.

61. C.H. Dodd, The Epistle of Paul to the Romans, (London: Collins, Fontana Books, 1959), p.241.

to be a woman apostle.<sup>62</sup> Yet today scholars still attempt to prove Junia to be a masculine name; the concept of a woman apostle is still a difficult one to many male scholars.

Another example of male scholarship bias in translation is the reference to Phoebe in Romans 16:1-2. Paul specifically refers to Phoebe as a diakonos of the church in Cenchrea. This Greek term has persistently been translated as "servant" or "deaconess". Although "servant" is a possible translation for the term, "deaconess" is not strictly accurate - the Greek is a masculine noun "diakonos", not the feminine version "diakonissa". (The latter term does not seem to have been used in the church during the first few centuries, but makes one of its first appearances in the late fourth-century Syrian document, the Apostolic Constitutions). However, to refer to Phoebe as a servant rather than as a deacon is a deliberate choice on the part of the translators, as "diakonos" is translated elsewhere in the New Testament as "deacon", for example in I Timothy 3:8, 10 and 13. It is translated as "servant" in I Corinthians 3:5 and 2 Corinthians 6:4. Another translation for the term is "minister", as is found in 2 Corinthians 6:3 (NIV). Barrett and Dodd<sup>63</sup>

suggest that "diakonos" was a general term at the time the Epistle was written; only later in Phillipians 1:1 was it used in a technical sense, to denote a particular order of ministry. However Dodd maintains that, "... whatever the

62. Leonard Swidler, Biblical Affirmations of Woman, p.229.

63. C.K. Barrett, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1962), p.283 and C.H. Dodd, The Epistle of Paul to the Romans, p.238.

'deacons' were at Philippi, that Phoebe was at Cenchreae ..." arguing that the order of deacons had its origin in the work of early Christians such as Phoebe.<sup>64</sup> In 2 Corinthians 6:3-10, Paul describes himself and his fellow workers as "servants of God" (diakonoi),

whose ministry (diakonia) should not be discredited. In the passage he makes it clear that this ministry of God's servants includes hardship and suffering, purity and love, truthful speech and the power of God in all these activities. The diakonoi, then, according to Paul, are missionaries, evangelists and church administrators. Phoebe is described as a diakonoi and an honest examination of Romans 16 must result in the restoration to her of her correct position in the early church, instead of the suitably feminine role which churchmen have always ascribed to her. The decision to translate "diakonos" as "deaconess" or "servant" in the case of Phoebe can thus be seen to reflect masculine bias in a church which experienced the ministry of women deacons for only a few centuries before the order was phased out.

Women deacons were an invaluable institution in the early church. Already in the lifetime of Paul, the office of deacon had been established (Phil 1:1), and I Timothy 3:8-11 describes the qualities necessary for men and women deacons. Although the Greek in this passage is obscure and "gynaikas" is sometimes interpreted to mean deacon's wives rather than women deacons, many scholars, including John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopseustia and Theodoret of Cyrrhus, and in

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64. Ibid., p.238.



modern times C.K. Barrett and E.F. Scott understand it to mean women deacons. Those who interpret it to mean deacons' wives overlook the lack of a parallel with the passage of bishops' wives - Timothy 3:1-7 - whereas in every other aspect there are matching parallels. Women deacons (deaconesses) are recorded as receiving ordination in the fourth century document Apostolic Constitutions.<sup>65</sup> This document also gives the correct prayers to be said by the bishop upon the ordination of women deacons, or deaconesses (diakonissa) as they were by then called. The Council of Nicea in 325 referred to deaconesses as those numbered among the clergy, and the Council of Chalcedon in 451 stipulated that the ordination of a woman as a deaconess should not occur before the woman reaches forty years of age. Tertullian (160-225) referred to women who had received the honour of ecclesiastical orders. Women deacons are also recorded as being persecuted in the early second century: a letter from Pliny to the Emperor Trajan refers to two women deacons who were tortured in order to extract information about the Christian movement.<sup>66</sup>

Although the deaconess movement gradually declined, deaconesses were still ordained, classified as clerics, and able to baptize and instruct in the faith, their attention being given particularly to women and children, until the fifth century. But in 442 the Council of Orange forbade any church ordination of deaconesses. The Council of Orleans II stated in 553 that women deaconesses should no longer receive further blessing because of the weakness of the

65. See Swidler, Biblical Affirmations of Woman, p.312.

66. Ibid., p.312.

female sex.<sup>67</sup> This attitude gained ground and, by the twelfth century, the order of deaconesses had virtually disappeared from both the Eastern and the Western church.

Women in the first few centuries of Christianity were thus unquestionably servants of the church in the role of deacons. However, in Romans 16, Phoebe is referred to as more than that. Paul refers to her as a "prostatis". This is generally translated as "helper". However, Fiorenza points out that the word appears nowhere else in the New Testament, and in Greek literature it is generally translated as ruler, leader or protector. Paul uses the verb form of the word in I Thessalonians 5:12, and it is translated as "over", meaning "having authority over". The phrase is, "those who are over you in the Lord". Fiorenza refers to similar verb forms in I Timothy 3:4,5 and 5:17, in a discussion on bishops, priests and deacons. Thus a form of the word "prostatis" is used in a discussion of those who hold authority in the church, and the same word is also used with reference to the deacon Phoebe.<sup>68</sup> It seems likely, therefore, that she exercised some sort of authority and responsibility in the church of Cenchrea. This position is not indicated in most biblical translations, pointing to another instance of translator bias: Phoebe is usually described as a deaconess and a helper, suitably "feminine" roles. She is not described as a deacon and one who exercised authority in the church - these are understood to be masculine-only roles.

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67. Ibid., p.314.

68. Fiorenza, In Memory of Her, p.181.

Priscilla's role in instructing Apollos, and in hosting a church, and Phoebe's deaconship and position of authority are both clear indications of women's leadership role in the early church. The knowledge of this role raises a serious question mark over yet another translation, that of I Timothy 5:2. In this passage Timothy is being instructed as to his duties. He had been ordained through the laying-on of hands by "the body of elders" (4:14). "Elders" in this verse is a translation of "presbyteriou" which could also be translated as "presbyters". Timothy must, therefore, have been placed in a position of authority above the rest of the presbyterate. He would clearly have had extensive duties in this position, and he received advice on those duties by the Deutero-Pauline writer. In Chapter 5 verses 1 and 2 he is advised upon how to deal with a "presbyteroi", and with "presbyteras". These two words are usually translated as "an older man" and "older women". However, they could also be translated as "a man presbyter" and "women presbyters". Verse 17 also speaks of men presbyters, in this instance translated as "elders". Thus, it is at least possible to translate verse 2 as "women elders" or "women presbyters" instead of "older women". Such a translation of verse 2 would provide further evidence for the presence of women in positions of leadership and authority in the early church.<sup>69</sup>

Yet another biblical pointer to women holding authority in the early church is the Second Epistle of John. The "Chosen Lady" in verse 1 is often interpreted as a reference to a

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69. Fiorenza, In Memory of Her, p.290; Swidler, Biblical Affirmations of Woman, p.315.

church. But the words could equally well be understood to refer to a real woman. The Letter indicates that the lady is responsible for the Christians in her charge; possibly a church met in her house and she led it. There is a reference to "your house" in the letter. The Letter is also very personal in tone, expressing a wish to "talk with you face to face" (verse 12), and speaking to the addressee as "dear lady" (verse 5). Finally, the reference to "your chosen sister" (verse 13) could refer to another woman. Light is thrown on this by Clement of Alexandria, who spoke of "elect persons" as priests, bishops, deacons and widows, and understood these to be in positions of responsibility in the church.<sup>70</sup> This lends weight to the possibility that the "chosen lady" could have been a member of the clerical leaders of the church.

On the question of women clerical leaders, Fiorenza refers to an early document, the Apostolic Church Order in The Ecclesiastical Canons of the Apostles, which provides fascinating evidence of the debate at that time on women's place in the church.<sup>71</sup> A dialogue between male and female disciples of Jesus struggles with the question of whether or not women can celebrate the Eucharist. The conclusion is that they cannot. This is an important debate, as it indicates that women performing the central function of priesthood may well have existed in the early church, and the concept was by no means unknown at that time. It is thus in the highest degree unlikely that Jesus himself could ever have given a clear directive against women performing

70. Leonard Swidler, Biblical Affirmations of Woman, p.316.

71. Fiorenza, In Memory of Her, p.307.

sacred or leadership roles within the religious community; in fact, it is in all probability Jesus' own openness to the equal service of women which led to the possibility of women priests to be debated in the first few centuries after his life.

## 2. Affirmative Pauline Passages on Women

Although there are a number of passages in the Epistles, which attempt to define and control women, there are also passages from the Epistles which exhibit a positive attitude to women. In I Thessalonians 2:7, I Corinthians 3:2 and Galatians 4:19, Paul uses feminine imagery to describe himself (Galatians 4:19) as in the pains of childbirth, a description that no man who despised women would be likely to use. The fact that Paul held women in respect is illustrated clearly in the following passages. In Philippians 2:1-15 and 2 Corinthians 8:13f, Paul commands mutual respect and equality among Christians. The vision of Romans 12:3-8 is of a body of mutually co-operating members, each performing the task or tasks for which God has fitted them. There is no mention here of sex roles and the exclusion of women from some tasks because they are believed to be unfit to perform them.

Only God decides who receives the various abilities; there is no hint of men defining the character and role of women, and excluding them from certain functions on this basis, and denying that God might have equipped a woman to perform a forbidden task. (It is possible that a critic might point to the use of the male gender names and pronoun in this passage as evidence that it pertains to men only; if this be

so, most of the teaching of both the Epistles and the Gospels, being also couched in male gender terms, is not relevant to women. Christianity itself then virtually becomes an exclusive male religion.)

The vision and logic of Romans 12:3-8 are unmistakable: the possession of God's gift entails an obligation upon the possessor to use it in the service of the Body of Christ, and an obligation upon the Body to accept that gift. Paul's letters contain other rejections of all divisions in Jesus Christ. Romans 10:12 rejects the Jewish-Gentile division. I Corinthians 12:13 rejects the Jewish-Gentile and the slave-free divisions. And Colossians 3:11 provides another list of all the divisions which have been overcome in Christ.

There are various other illustrations of the New Testament writers' attitudes to women being much more balanced than certain passages may suggest. For example, the New Testament on several occasions appears to lay the blame for sin entirely upon the person of Eve, the first woman (in particular, I Timothy 2:14). Yet, in Romans 5:12-14 and in I Corinthians 15:21-22, the presence of sin in the world is attributed only to one man, Adam; Eve is not mentioned. Paul must have been aware of the Rabbinic tradition that Eve was the cause of sin and death,<sup>72</sup> but he did not continue it in all his writings. Instead, in some instances he asserted the view of men and women expressed in Jesus' teaching on the equality of rights and responsibilities

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72. Leonard Swidler, Biblical Affirmations of Woman, p.155.

within marriage. I Corinthians 7:1-9 firmly emphasizes these rights and responsibilities as being equal. Orr and Walther describe this passage as "... a remarkable statement of conjugal parity, which has exegetical relevance for several later considerations in this Epistle and certainly to the Christian understanding of marriage according to New Testament teaching". The mutual jurisdiction of husbands and wives indicates equal rights and absolute equality between marriage partners.<sup>73</sup>

Jesus' teachings on divorce and his insistence on equal rights in this area, are also maintained by Paul in I Corinthians 7:10-16. In these instances, Paul shows no anti-feminine bias; instead he clearly sees both men and women as equally responsible for sin, and gives them equal right in marriage. Similarly, with regard to celibacy, I Corinthians 7:25-40 makes it clear that women and men had the right to choose to refrain from marrying and thus live celibate lives. Women's right to choose celibacy is particularly meaningful in a society where a girl was frequently not consulted about the marriage her father had arranged for her, and even widows were seen as belonging to their husband's family. Paul is certainly permitting women considerable religious freedom, by giving them the right to choose celibacy if they wished; for he is giving them control over their own lives.

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73. W.F. Orr and J.A. Walther, I Corinthians, p.208.

However Paul's most famous statement that all religious distinctions between men and women are overcome in Christ is the "freedom charter" of Galatians 3:27-28:

For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

H.D. Betz suggests that this is part of an early Christian baptism liturgy.<sup>74</sup> If this is so, it is an excellent expression of Jesus' message of love for God and neighbour. All distinctions between human beings are here broken down and declared to be meaningless in the Christian community. Paul states in Galatians 4:4-5 that God sent Jesus to redeem those under the law, that Christians might all receive the full rights of children of God. The law in Judaism upheld deep divisions amongst people: Greeks were seen to be inferior to Jews, slaves to free and women to men. Under the law, the distinctions between different human beings had become causes for domination, contempt and the resultant oppression and suffering. Thus Jewish males were, under the law, the most privileged group in society; slave women were probably the least. The comparison between the threefold daily prayer said by Jewish men, and Galatians 3:28, is overwhelming<sup>75</sup>:

Praised be God that He has not created me a Gentile.

There is neither Jew nor Greek (for you are all one in Christ Jesus)

74. Hans Dieter Betz, A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), pp.182-184.

75. Leonard Swidler, Biblical Affirmations of Woman, p.323.



Praised be God that He has not created me a woman

There is neither male nor female (for you are all one in Christ Jesus)

Praised be God that He has not created me a slave

There is neither slave nor free (for you are all one in Christ Jesus)

All these divisions between people, resulting in hierarchies of religious superiority and inferiority, have been destroyed by Christ. All Christians receive the full rights of God's children. F.F. Bruce adds that in Galatians 3:28 it is not the distinctiveness between different people that is being abolished by their inequality of religious role. In Christ Jesus all persons may exercise spiritual leadership in the Christian community.<sup>76</sup>

According to Galatians 3:28, then, Jewish people converting to Christianity, had to discard their superiority as the chosen people of God; masters had to lose their superior status to their slaves; and men had to give up religious and social domination. In practice, it was a vision well-nigh impossible to implement. The "metanoia" necessary for such acute changes was simply not there; and although Jewish Christians did gradually lose their superior status, this was probably due more to the rapid evangelization of many Gentiles, who quickly became the majority of the church, rather than to a willing and universal change of heart on the part of Jewish Christians. Unfortunately for slaves and women, no such social and political impetus was forthcoming

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76. F.F. Bruce, The Epistle to the Galatians, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), pp.189-190.

for their own liberation. As a result, it did not take place.

Hans Dieter Betz describes most admirably the message of verse 28:

The first part (verse 28 a-c) contains three parallel statements in the present tense, which define the religious, cultural and social consequences of the Christian baptismal initiation. The three statements, extremely concise as they are, name the old status of the baptized and declare this old status abolished. By implication, a new status is claimed, but no further explanation is given at this point. It is significant that Paul makes these statements not as utopian ideals or as ethical demands, but as accomplished facts ... There can be no doubt that Paul's statements have social and political implications of even a revolutionary dimension ... These ... include the abolition of the religious and social distinctions between Jews and Greeks, slaves and freemen, men and women. These social changes are claimed as part of the process of redemption ... Being rescued from the present evil aeon (Gal 1:4) and being changed to a "new creation" implies these radical social and political changes ... The Christian is now "dead" to the social, religious and cultural distinction characteristic of the old world-order.<sup>77</sup>

The question whether Galatians 3:28 is expressing merely a personal and "internal" equality and freedom, or whether it is expressing social and political equality and freedom as well, is a crucial one. Betz<sup>78</sup> argues that there are considerable grounds for understanding Paul to be expressing both the second and the first dimensions of freedom. However, the Letter to Philemon and I Corinthians 7:21 indicate Paul's reluctance to cause social rebellion which would undoubtedly unleash violent repression upon the

77. H.D. Betz, A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia, pp.189-190.

78. Ibid., p.191.

church. Taking the alternative of internalizing and personalizing the message of 3:28 was an obvious solution at a time of social hostility and persecution.

Paul's vision of the oneness of the Body of Christ was most clearly applied in the case of the Jew-Greek division. This has always been seen as one of Paul's greatest achievements. His denial of the necessity for Christians to be circumcized and his abolition of the Jewish purity laws regarding food were enormous steps to take in implementing his vision. His efforts brought together Jews and Gentiles across the great divide that different cultures and Jewish laws had created. The vision of the oneness of slave and free was less rigorously implemented. Unlike the Jew-Greek dichotomy, Paul did not attempt in general to abolish the social structures of slavery and destroy the gulf between slave and master. He did attempt to implement his vision, however, in his Letter to Philemon, in the case of Onesimus the runaway slave. Paul acknowledged the legal claim which the master of Onesimus had upon his slave, but he appealed to the higher claim of belonging to the Body of Christ. Onesimus was to be received, not as a slave, but as a brother. Here Paul is undoubtedly claiming that the full rights of a child of God supersede the rights conferred by the law. Onesimus' dignity and freedom were of paramount importance.

Christ's removal of all divisions between men and women was, as in the case of slavery, but partially implemented. Women were deacons, disciples, even apostles. They taught the

faith and shared the responsibility for administering the church. From the Letter of Paul to Philemon,<sup>1</sup> it appears that slaves were also involved in performing such duties. Paul asks that Onesimus be returned to him in order that he could help Paul whilst the latter was in prison. Paul says that Onesimus is useful to him, and indicates his need of the man. It is clear that Onesimus was performing tasks that Paul would have performed, had he been at liberty; tasks which must have carried responsibility. Thus slaves and women both performed important roles within the church. Yet neither group appear to have been seriously considered by the church to require their positions in society altered. The Epistles demand that love and concern be the basis of the master-slave and husband-wife relationships, but they do not suggest that the divisions and oppressions between these different groups be literally removed. Yet Paul and others worked extremely hard to remove the divisions between Jewish and Gentile Christians.

There are several possible reasons why they did not initially exhibit similar motivation with regard to the other divisions within the Christian ranks. Firstly, they probably needed to concentrate most of their energy on proselytizing and on working out the faith and structure of the new Christian church. Secondly, of the three groups which Galatians 3:28 specifies, the most troublesome problems appear to have initially been experienced between Jewish and Gentile Christians. These groups were clearly very vociferous and contentious about problems such as circumcision and the consumption of different foods. Thus

Paul states repeatedly in Romans 10:12, I Corinthians 12:13 and Colossians 3:11 that the Jewish-Gentile division is overcome in Christ. Thirdly, the division between Jews and Gentiles, although deeply rooted within the social structure, were primarily understood to be divisions between men; and therefore between equals or near-equals. But the division between men and women, and slaves and masters, were divisions between groups of very unequal social strength. To mend the gulf between Jew and Gentile was a startling achievement. But to have abolished the inequalities between men and women and between slaves and masters would have been totally revolutionary.

A third and important point is that women's position in the early church was initially much improved, following the tradition of Jesus. Any group can cope with just so much change at a time. But, instead of implementing further the Galatians vision, the church gradually took the opposite path; it imposed more and more restrictions upon women until, by the twelfth century, even the limited foothold in the church hierarchy of the deaconess order had disappeared. Of course, as various authors have earlier pointed out, the church faced major problems with the Gnostic and other sects, and with the antipathy and persecutions of the surrounding society. The environment of the church in the first few centuries was far from conducive to revolutionary innovations such as equal respect and value for all members of the church, in practice as well as in theory, and materially as well as spiritually.

### A Concluding Hermeneutical Reflection

It is obvious from the above discussion of the biblical evidence put forward in the debate that the conclusions drawn from scripture depend largely upon the hermeneutic adopted. In other words, each Christian understands scripture within the context of a certain social, cultural, intellectual, emotional or spiritual world-view. Within that world-view the Christian formulates a hermeneutical approach to scripture which he/she understands to be most closely aligned to the fundamental message of Christ.

A glance at Christendom will indicate the immense variety of hermeneutical approaches used by the various denominations, sects, and groupings. It is not within the scope of this thesis to examine all these. It is however necessary to identify the prominent hermeneutical approaches within the debate on the ordination of women, and to identify which of these approaches we have chosen to use.

A prominent approach among opponents to the ordination of women is a fundamentalist one. In this hermeneutic certain individual statements concerning women are understood to be normative. There is no accepted criterion of relative authority and validity regarding these statements. However, there is a wide spectrum of differences amongst this group as to which statements are normative, and what precisely the normative statements are saying in relation to women priests. Thus some opponents to women priests will uphold the command for women to cover their heads, as well as commands for silence and submission. Others regard the head-covering command as non-normative, but uphold the

commands for silence and submission. Still others accept women praying and prophesying but maintain that the command for submission is normative and bars women from the teaching ministry and from holding any position of authority in the church.

A second approach among opponents to women priests is a conservative, but not strictly fundamentalist, approach. These opponents interpret the biblical passages on women to mean that women may teach and preach in the congregation, but may not enter holy orders as this confers authority; or ultimately may enter holy orders as a deacon but not as a priest nor as a bishop. The hermeneutic in these cases is primarily a traditional, conservative one, upholding the authority of the passages on women but attempting to translate them into an acceptable form for the twentieth century.

Looking at the hermeneutic approaches used by the advocates of the ordination of women, one can discern two general positions. The first, a middle-of-the-road position, upholds the authority of the scriptural texts concerning women but argues that they need to be fundamentally reinterpreted. This group maintains that the submission commanded in scripture does not imply an unequal relationship between men and women, nor any inferiority on the part of women, and is not an obstacle to the ordination of women to the priesthood. This position attempts, then, to hold together the biblical commands on women with the demands of twentieth century Christians for sexual equality in the church.

The second hermeneutic approach among advocates of women priests argues that the passages on the subordination of women do not have, and never have had, any normative implications whatever. This approach maintains that these passages are a product of the social, political and cultural milieu in which they were written, and are in fact contradictory to the fundamental message of Christ. Such a hermeneutic looks, not to tradition nor to mainline theology for its inspiration, but to the liberation message of the gospel. The gospel in line with the message of the prophets, proclaims the liberation of humankind from sin and the structures of sin. Foremost amongst the structures of sin is the oppression of women, and from this oppression Christ has set us free. It is the task of the church to actualize this freedom in history.

It is this liberation hermeneutic that we have chosen as the hermeneutic closest to the gospel of Christ, and therefore the hermeneutic best fitted to approach the biblical texts discussed in previous chapters. It is therefore our task in this section to elucidate our basic hermeneutic principles.

A first principle, almost universally accepted today, is summed up by Robert McAfee Brown, who points out that "what we see depends on where we are standing".<sup>79</sup> There is no neutral, objective stance for the evaluation of biblical texts. The concept of a totally value-free interpretation

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79. Quoted in Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Toward a Feminist Biblical Hermeneutics: Biblical Interpretation and Liberation Theology", from A Guide to Contemporary Hermeneutics: Major Trends in Biblical Interpretation, (ed.) Donald K. McKim, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), p.359.



of early Christian texts and a fully objective reconstruction of early Christian history fails to take into account its own presuppositions and world-view. This fact entails several fundamental sub-principles.

Firstly, all theologians and exegetes must recognize their own social, cultural, political and intellectual beliefs. Secondly, it must be recognized that the various issues of Christian scholarship do not arise in a vacuum. As Fiorenza points out,

... all scholarship on early Christian history is determined by contemporary questions and interests. Insofar as the Bible is not just a document of ancient history, but is Holy Scripture which claims authority and validity in the contemporary church, biblical-historical inquiries are always determined by ecclesial and societal interests and questions.<sup>80</sup>

For this reason the study of women in the time of Jesus and in the early church is no more a result of twentieth century socio-political concerns than is any other issue in New Testament scholarships and in theology in general. This study is not simply a womens' issue, marginal to the main endeavours of Christian research; it is of immediate importance for all areas of exegetical and theological reflection.

The third sub-principle is the recognition that Western culture in general, and academia in particular, functions with an androcentric understanding of reality. It is an unquestioned fact that men have controlled the church for

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80. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "You are Not to be Called Father: Early Christian History in a Feminist Perspective", from The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics, (ed.) Norman K. Gottwald, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1983), pp.395-396.

all of Christian history. The attempt to trace in the New Testament the activities of women in the early church must therefore be made with the awareness that the New Testament authors, predominantly and perhaps exclusively male, wrote not objective factual accounts but evangelistic and pastoral theology. It is thus obvious that the information about women in the New Testament is redacted and conditioned by a patristic world-view.<sup>81</sup>

A second hermeneutic principle concerns the nature and reality of God's Word. This again entails three sub-principles. Firstly, the Word of God is not a static concept of absolute truth, but a person, Jesus Christ, acting in an historical place and time. This principle is in line with the Old Testament, which, as José Miguez Bonino points out, understands God's Word not as "... a conceptual communication but as a creative event, a history-making pronouncement".<sup>82</sup> Secondly, for this reason faith in God is not biblically presented as pure knowledge, but as a way of life. Jesus specifically used the word 'way' in reference to himself. And thirdly, Jesus taught that the way of the Christian faith is the love of God and of our neighbour.

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81. The question may arise as to whether this androcentric world-view is not divinely inspired? This brings us to a crucial theological principle, viz. that God is infinitely beyond human understanding and characterization. Thus God is infinitely beyond human sexual differentiation, and does not understand the world through either an androcentric or a gynocentric viewpoint. The nature of God is above sexual distinction, as both men and women are made in the image of God. The locus of God's revelation to humanity is found not in the androcentric world-view of the biblical authors but the life and ministry of Jesus.

82. José Miguez Bonino, "Hermeneutics, Truth and Praxis", from A Guide to Contemporary Hermeneutics, *ibid.*, p.346.

Knowledge and understanding of God is therefore achieved only through the positive action of love. For this reason we can only judge whether a suggestion or action reflects the Word of God by assessing whether it is a suggestion or action made in love.

The understanding of Christian love comprises a third hermeneutic principle. Love as Jesus proclaimed and lived it is liberating, edifying, selfless giving. As Paul describes it in 1 Corinthians 13, it is patient, kind, faithful, hopeful, never jealous, conceited, proud nor selfish. God's love for all people is deathless and sinless, a love which allows all believers to fulfil their potential as human beings made in the image of God. Love as Jesus commanded all Christians to practise it is the same. Thus Christian love promotes the full humanity of people, making it possible for each person to become what God wants them to be.

From the point of view of feminist theology this means that whatever promotes the full humanity of women as made in the image of God, is from God. On the other hand, as Ruether states,

... whatever diminishes or denies the full humanity of woman must be recognized as not reflecting the divine or authentic relation to the divine, nor the authentic nature of things, nor the message or work of an authentic redeemer or community of redemption.<sup>83</sup>

Our fourth hermeneutic principle is that of Christian freedom. Christ brought liberation from the structures of

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83. Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Theology as Critique of and Emancipation from Sexism", from The Vocation of the Theologian, (ed.) Theodore W. Jennings, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), p.27.

sin and death. His signs and teachings freed people from illness, demon possession, religious law, social and conventional restraints, injustice, misery and even death. But Jesus did not simply remove the oppression which controlled peoples' lives. He replaced that oppressive control with responsibility to God.<sup>84</sup>

The freedom and responsibility of the Christian faith demands that each Christian work in partnership with God towards the fulfilment of his/her human potential. Each Christian is responsible to God for his/her own life, within the freedom of God's total love. This freedom and responsibility negates the patriarchal definition of woman's character and role in life.<sup>85</sup> It affirms God's will that women and men use their gifts and talents in whatever area of service God chooses. Essentially, the freedom and responsibility proclaimed by Christ places each Christian in a loving relationship with God, and within that relationship calls each Christian to a God-centred self-understanding.

The final hermeneutical principle derives from eschatology.

Although the Kingdom of God was uniquely established in the

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84. In Luke 10:38-42 Jesus liberated Mary from the feminine role of domestic duties and gave to her the responsibility of theological canon. In John 4:1-42 Jesus freed the Samaritan woman from the ostracism she suffered on account of her race, sex and immoral life, and gave to her the responsibility for witnessing to him. In John 8:2-11 Jesus freed the woman taken in adultery from the judgment of her accusers and gave to her the responsibility of her own life. And in appearing in his resurrected form to the women first, Jesus freed them from the stigma of being unreliable witnesses and gave to them the ultimate responsibility of witnessing to his resurrection.

85. Love, freedom and responsibility in the Christian faith negate the patriarchal idea of a feminine character and role. This idea is purely a cultural institution intended to maintain men in positions of power and privilege and keep women ignorant and powerless.

incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Kingdom is yet to come in its comprehensive fullness. All Christian action must therefore be directed towards the coming of God's Kingdom. At the same time, it is, therefore, not within the control of humans or the church to bring in the Kingdom, as the Kingdom is God's prerogative. It is, however, the responsibility of Christians to bear witness to its reality as established in Christ, or to its coming in the fullness of time. A major way of doing so is to order the life of the church in such a way that it becomes a sign of the Kingdom rather than a symbol of the status quo. This, in turn, becomes a key element in the interpretation of Scripture, so that, for example, creation is understood not in itself but also in the light of its fulfilment in the new creation initiated and anticipated in Christ. With eschatology as a key to biblical interpretation there would be no clinging to tradition for its own sake; rather, the question of the love and justice of the Kingdom of God would predominate.

**Part III: PERSPECTIVES AND PROPOSALS**

### PART III: PERSPECTIVES AND PROPOSALS

#### Chapter 7: Beyond the Debate: The Phenomenon of Christian Sexism

In previous sections and chapters we have spoken of patriarchal oppression of women, of androcentric thought-structures and beliefs. This theory and practice of the inferiority of women to men is generally referred to as sexism. The exclusion of women from the priesthood in much of the Anglican Communion is, as we have contended, a clear manifestation of Christian sexism. As was stated in the Introduction, a study of the debate on the ordination of women to the priesthood is therefore also a case-study of sexism in the Church. The debate cannot honestly be viewed - as it frequently is - as an isolated issue, a question of personal hermeneutics. Instead it must be placed in the context of the whole history of sexism in church and society. It is only when placed in this context that the arguments both for and against can be fully evaluated.

Even a brief glance at the sexism of the church over the past two thousand years reveals many parallels between definitions of and attitudes towards women in the past, and present arguments against the priesthood of women. Open belief in the inferiority of women, expressed throughout

church history, has its obvious parallels in the arguments of the present. It is by examining the sexism of the past that we can most clearly reveal the prejudice and the threat which determine the attitudes and arguments of the present-day opponents to the ordination of women to the priesthood. We turn, then, to examine the ideology of sexism as it is understood by feminist theologians in order to prepare the way for our final evaluation of the debate on the ordination of women to the priesthood.

(a) The Ideology of Sexism

Sexism, in its broadest definition, is the self-definition of men as superior to women, and the consequent domination and oppression of women by men. The self-definition of one group as superior to another is at the root of the ideologies of sexism, racism, and classism, all of which have given, and still give rise, to incalculable tyranny and suffering. In our own century, Nazism provides an overwhelming example of the lengths to which a group's belief in its personal superiority can go. In past centuries, the slave trade and witchhunts illustrate the destructive power of racism and sexism. It is in the polarization of one group against another that the seeds of tyranny and oppression lie.

Religion is almost invariably used to justify an ideology and its resultant domination and oppression of the "inferior" group. Christianity was used by Nazism to justify the "superiority" of the Aryan race. A significant part of the church became allied with National Socialists,



and supported its self-understanding and interest. Similarly in my own country, apartheid has been given theological and practical support by a number of powerful denominations. For a much longer period, in fact since its very beginnings, Christianity has been used to justify the domination of women by men. Men have claimed for themselves the image and agency of God, maintaining that they were closer than women to the Godhead, and were therefore God's natural choice of vehicle and representative. Women's inferiority to men, extending through every facet of human existence, was claimed to originate in creation itself, and by the will of God. God was thus used to justify the social and religious domination and subjugation of women.

The tendency of individuals or groups to define themselves as superior to other individuals or groups appears to be inherent within fallen human nature. Ruether<sup>1</sup> suggests that this self-other polarization occurred very early in the history of human consciousness. The tribal group understood itself as human, over against inhuman nature and other human groups who were not recognized as such. This self-other polarity thus early began to be aligned with the good-evil polarity in human thought. Ruether writes that many tribes did not have an inclusive word for "human". The name of their own tribe functioned also as the concept "human", reducing all other groups to a non-human, and sub-human status. In a similar way, the males of the tribes particularly became the embodiment of their own definition of human, over against the females. Thus, the word for

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1. Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1983), pp.161-162.

human in many languages is identical with the word for man, reducing women to a sub-human position.

As Ruether goes on to explain, the self-identification of one group as human over against other groups prepares the way for the next move in the polarization process. This is the identification of "human" with those qualities which are regarded as good and admirable by the society.<sup>2</sup> In this way, the socially valuable qualities of human beings are identified with those who appropriate the definition of "human", and the "non-human" groups are described as having socially negative qualities by contrast. These others are thus firmly established in an inferior status in the society and, because they are understood to possess socially undesirable qualities, they are despised, degraded and exploited.

The dominant group, defining itself as "human", and as possessing the socially desirable qualities of humanity, thus creates an ideology from which the society absorbs its self-understanding. The oppressed group then internalizes an identity of inferiority, and loses the ability of self-definition. The dominant group projects upon the oppressed group any aspects of its humanity which it despises and rejects, and then uses these projected qualities as proof and justification of the other group's inferiority and its own right to abuse, exploit and even kill members of the oppressed group. In this way, men have identified themselves as superior to women, white people to black

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2. Ibid., p.162.

people, and Christians to Jews. White Christian men have occupied the pinnacle of human power and self-esteem.

The projection of socially undesirable and, therefore, "bad" human qualities upon the oppressed group leaves the dominant group with an unacknowledged fear of the "evil" group. This fear leads eventually to a need to eradicate the "evil" group and thus cleanse the society. The Christian projection upon women of the "evil" qualities of sexual desire, weakness, folly and susceptibility to sin led to the witchhunts of the Middle Ages. Similar projections of whites upon blacks led to the justification of slavery by the Western nations, or produced today the rationalization of apartheid and the existence of the Klu Klux Klan. And the image of the "dirty Jew" led to countless pogroms and at last to the Holocaust.

The attribution of inferiority by one group to another, the projection of qualities regarded as evil upon the "inferior" group, and the subsequent exploitation and oppression of the "inferior" group, constitutes a fundamental distortion and corruption of human relationships. Christianity teaches that human relationships should exist upon a footing of love, equality, and mutual concern. Instead, this self-other relationship is distorted into a superior-inferior, good-evil polarity. In sexism, men have defined themselves as superior, wise and virtuous (vir), and have polarized women as inferior, weak and foolish. Those human qualities socially regarded as valuable and desirable have been primarily associated with men - strength, intelligence,

rationality, wisdom, virtue, progressiveness, creativity, courage, etc. Those human qualities which are generally despised have been projected upon women - weakness, foolishness, irrationality, stupidity, tendency to sinfulness, narrow-mindedness, lack of vision, fearfulness and subservience. Women have also been defined as the sole repositories of those human qualities which, although not fully despised, are nevertheless not socially admired - gentleness, timidity, kindness, supportiveness, tenderness, and the willingness for self-sacrifice.

The polarization and definition of men and women as superior and inferior has resulted in men being regarded as normative humanity, and in being far more highly valued in society than women. Thus, boy babies have generally been preferred to girl babies, and a woman bearing a son has received a higher social status than a woman bearing a daughter. The equation of humanity with masculinity is demonstrated numberless times in language, most prominently in the use of "man" to refer to a male human being, and the use of the same word generically, to refer to all human beings, including females. The understanding of male humanity as normative automatically sets women apart as other and inferior. This provides the groundwork for the ideology of sexism and the consequent oppression of women. Women's "inferiority" has justified their servile role in society and the withholding from them of education, access to the professions, equality before the law, and the right to vote.

Sexism is a male ideology supporting male interests. It is however, to a large extent, internalized by women who then help to perpetuate it. Even with female help, however, sexism has required religious, legal and ideological structures to enable it to continue. Women are not inferior to men and, thus, keeping women in their male-defined place is a constant endeavour. Physical force, such as wife-beating and rape; legal structures such as, until recently, womens' perpetual minority in the eyes of the law and lack of franchise; religious dictates, such as a woman's marriage vow of obedience to her husband, and womens' exclusion from the priesthood and the power structures of the church; social pressure for conformity to the feminine social ideal and threat of social rejection if this conformity is not made; economic weakness due to, until recently, exclusion from wage-earning employment and the transfer of family wealth through the male line; ridicule, flattery and persuasion - the array of forces designed to perpetuate or enforce sexism have affected every aspect of a women's life, from the cradle to the grave. The church has played a very major role in this process, supporting the sexist status quo throughout its history.

Sexism thus oppresses women in every aspect of their selfhood; physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually. However, sexism also distorts men. Although men have allocated to themselves the most valued human characteristics, and have, throughout history, monopolized education, professional opportunity, political power, culture, and religious expression, they have not, as Ruether

remarks, "... succeeded in actualizing a humanity that we should generally want to emulate. Both in its brutality and its intellectual abstractivism, sexism distorts male humanity ... the distortion of male humanity is an endemic disease that both humanity and the planet itself may not long survive ...".<sup>3</sup>

Male humanity has through sexism become characterised by the use of violence to obtain its own ends, and to settle disputes. The cult of the machismo is emphasized in every stage of a male's life. Hand in hand with this orientation to violence goes the perception of reality in hierarchical terms. Violence gives rise to control and obedience, domination and oppression, the winner and the loser. Relationships are perceived exclusively in terms of superordinate and subordinate, never in terms of equality. Somebody has to be the "boss". The hierarchical perception of reality also has a distancing and alienating effect, whereby the believed inferiors are not recognized in their full humanity, but are rather perceived solely in terms of the interest and aims of the superordinate group. Thus women, peasants, servants and employees are defined in terms of their usefulness to white men, and are moved around, used, disposed of, and even killed if they are no longer useful or are seen as hindrance to the plans of their masters. The distance between people which a hierarchical understanding of reality produces enables the superordinate to enact extreme violence upon others without recognizing their humanity and personhood. Violence, hierarchy and

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3. Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, p.178.

distancing all stem from male sexism which exalts strength and power and derides emotion and loving human contact. In this sense women have escaped the great dehumanization from which men suffer, despite - and perhaps also because of - their history of oppression.

(b) Sexism in Early Church History

The participation of the church in the ideology and structures of sexism was and is extensive. From very early on in its history, the church incorporated and reinforced the sexism of the surrounding culture, providing Christian forms and justifications. In a similar fashion, the church accepted and supported racism in the form of slavery, and classism in its unquestioning acceptance of the economic structures of the societies in which it functioned. The Christianization of sexism begins in the Epistles, where commands to women enjoining subservience and silence, and support for these commands drawn from the myth of Eve, develop and rigidify with the passage of time. Thus, Paul's commands to women in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 are hesitant and tentative in comparison with the strict commands in the Haustafeln, which in turn do not display the naked mysogynism of 1 Timothy 2:11-15. In this way the belief in women's inferiority and subservience received New Testament embodiment and Genesis 2 became the perfect "proof" of women's greater weakness and susceptibility to sin.

Once sexism had entered Christian theology, it grew from strength to strength. Sexism and its attendant values of violence, hierarchy and alienation played a major role in

transforming the Christian church from an egalitarian missionary movement preaching love and salvation to a hierarchical and monarchical institution capable of replacing many of the political structures of the Roman Empire. Fiorenza<sup>4</sup> observes that the authority in the church shifted from a charismatic and communal authority to authority vested in local officers who then gradually absorbed both the teaching authority of the prophet and apostle and the decision-making power of the community.

In the early phase of missionary activity, the church practised an understanding of office as service rather than as hierarchical authority. Ida Raming<sup>5</sup> points out that the need to spread the gospel in view of Christs' imminent return was so great that the help of women was indispensable. Middle class women of means were frequently among the first to receive the good news from an apostle, and they then undertook the responsibility of spreading it further (Rom 16:1f; 1 Cor 16:19; Acts 16:14f). Women were not simply hostesses of house fellowships, but leaders of local Christian groups. Women prophets were also acknowledged and valued in the Pauline Churches. This charismatic conception of service allowed individual gifts to be used, and made it possible for women to play an active part in the evangelisation, edification and leadership of the early Christian communities.

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4. Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, In Memory of Her, (London: SCM Press, 1983), p.294.

5. Ida Raming, "From the Freedom of the Gospel to the Petrified 'Men's Church': The Rise and Development of Male Domination in the Church", from Concilium: Women in a Men's Church, (ed.) Virgil Elizondo and Norbert Greinacher, (Edinburgh: T & T Clarke; New York: Seabury Press, 1980), p.6.



To a large extent, it must have been the disappearance of the imminent expectation of the Parousia which allowed the change in the understanding of office to occur. Together with this change in office, came a shift from leadership as a task available to all the baptized to a leadership role restricted to men only. With male headship the church lost its egalitarian community structure and became structured along the lines of the patriarchal household. The Pastoral Epistles demonstrate this new structure with their understanding of the church as the household of God (1 Tim 3:15) administered by the bishop, whose qualities were no different from those of a good paterfamilias in that society (1 Tim 3:2ff); Tit 1:7ff). The other members of the church were to be duly submissive to their head in the same way that they must be submissive in the home.

The overwhelming emphasis placed in the Pastoral Epistles upon hierarchy, headship or submission to authority can of course, to a large extent, be explained by the conditions of hostility and persecution experienced by the church at that time. But the acceptance of Christianity and its incorporation into the Roman Empire, far from reversing the forces of conservatism, merely reinforced the patriarchal structures of the church. The church became a part of the social order to which it was meant to witness.

As the hierarchical structure of the church became more and more firmly entrenched, so the alienation between clergy and laity, between men and women, and most of all, between

clergy and women, grew. A major contributing factor towards this was the development of asceticism. The Platonic distinction between spirit and body, inherited from the Hellenistic culture, became quickly pressed into the service of sexism with the association of men with spirit and women with body. The further association of the body with lower, fallen nature gave rise to the doctrine of the evilness of sexuality and the overwhelming association of sin with sexual activity. The pursuit of holiness, seen in this context, demanded the avoidance of sexual activity. Women, the natural partners in sex, and the inferior, fallen, sinful side of humanity, thus had to be shunned. Women in this way came to be viewed as seductive temptresses, betraying men from the paths of virtue into the evils of the flesh. The guilt springing from frustrated male sexual desire was projected onto women, who then became objects of hatred and fear by the clergy. Allied with this perception of women as carnal and physical came the ancient Levitical taboo on menstruation, and women's natural biological functions became regarded once again as unclean and defiling. By C.E.668 women were forbidden to enter a church or communicate during their times of menstruation.<sup>6</sup>

The sexist hatred and fear of women created in the clergy by their frustrated sexual needs is clearly evidenced in the writings of the church "fathers". Reuther remarks that the letters of Jerome exhibit "... violent libidinal repression that generates its own opposite in vivid sensual

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6. Joan Morris, Against Nature and God, (London & Oxford: Mowbrays, 1973), p.110.

fantasizing under the guise of antisexual polemics".<sup>7</sup> The myth of Eve is used again and again to explain and justify women's inferiority and sinfulness. Mysogynism grew to such an extent that Ambrosiaster denied that women were created in the image of God. The entire guilt and responsibility for the Fall was attributed to women.

Women's perceived inferiority, "natural" subservience, and carnal nature rapidly closed all avenues of church work open to them. By the end of the third century there were only two forms of church ministry available to women in the institutionalized church: the offices of church widow and deaconess.<sup>8</sup>

Ida Raming<sup>9</sup> argues that women leaders in the church were being feared as rivals to the developing male diaconate and to the presbyterate and episcopal offices. Also, the presbyters of the early church were gradually developing into cultic priests with sacramental functions, from which women's inferiority and "uncleanness" debarred them. In place of the charismatically oriented order of widows, the

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7. Rosemary Radford Ruether, Religion and Sexism, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974), p.172.

8. The duties of the widow consisted of prayer, and of caring for women in their homes. In the Syrian Didascalia, a book of church order dating from the first decade of the third century, widows were forbidden to undertake any religious instruction, or to administer any sacrament, including baptism; acts which they had previously performed. At the Council of Laodicea, in C.E. 343, it was ruled that women were no longer eligible to be appointed as elders (presbyterae) in the church.

9. Ida Raming, "From the Freedom of the Gospel to the Petrified Men's Church: The Rise and Development of Male Domination in the Church", *ibid.*, p.8.

Didascalia instituted the female diaconate, with a fixed, lowly place in the ecclesiastical hierarchy.<sup>10</sup>

It thus took only two to three centuries for the sexism of the church to take forms of considerable oppression. The belief in the ethical and anthropological inferiority of women, coupled with ascetic tendencies and the sacralization of worship after the pattern of the Old Testament, combined to produce a virulent antifeminism which has never, until the present century, been seriously challenged in the church. In fact, succeeding centuries only served to reinforce sexism in the church.<sup>11</sup>

Aquinas contributed greatly to the tradition of church sexism when he combined Aristotelean biology with Christian theology, and thus placed Christian sexism on a "scientific" foundation. Following Aristotle, Aquinas held that the female is defective in nature, being a

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10. Early in the fourth century, the Apostolic Constitutions argued against women being allowed to teach or baptize, on the basis of their inferiority of sex. In the fourth, and again in the sixth centuries, the ordination of deaconesses was prohibited. As the misogynism of the church, and particularly of the church "fathers" increased, the restrictions upon women became wider and wider, until they were not permitted to serve at the altar, nor even permitted to enter a church during their periods of "ritual uncleanness". (See Raming p.8; Swidler p.314).

11. It is fascinating to note that at Macon in 585, a church council devoted its time to a discussion of whether or not women possess souls. The opponents in this debate classified women as brutes, without soul or reason. The council, however, concluded that women were human, although weak or sinful. That this question could be raised shows the extent to which sexism had developed. (See Matilda Joselyn Gage, Women, Church and State, (Watertown, Massachusetts: Persephone Press, reprint ed. 1980; original publication 1895), p.26.

"misbegotten male".<sup>12</sup> The girl child was a defective human being, the result of an accident to the male sperm, which was thought to contain the complete human being in potentia and to correctly reproduce another male. Aquinas believed that the male was created to the more noble activity, intellectual knowledge, whereas the female, although possessing a rational soul, was created solely because of her reproductive ability. The female, as created solely to ensure the preservation of the species, was the only explanation Aquinas could conceive for the existence of women for, he maintained, in any other activity a man is better accompanied by a male helpmate. However, even in the process of reproduction, the woman was only the passive and material partner, receiving the seed, whilst the male was the active and more excellent partner. The mother provided only the matter of the child, whilst the father provided the form.

The subordination and inferiority of women to men was thus, for

Aquinas, established in the very nature of male and female in God's original creation. Although both sexes possessed the imago dei and a rational soul, the inferiority of the female body led to an inferiority of soul. Women's intelligence and moral discernment was inferior and thus the inequality between male and female existed in the physical, moral and intellectual realms.

Aquinas affirmed that Christ had to assume a specifically male sexuality, because the masculine sex was more perfect

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12. Mary Daly, The Church and the Second Sex, (London: Geoffrey Chapman Ltd., 1968), pp.52-3.

and strong, and because the roles of Christ as pastor and redeemer were incompatible with the subordinate status of women. It followed, therefore, that women could not participate in holy orders, for a sacrament was a sign and in the female sex no eminence of degree could be signified.

The "proofs" provided by Aquinas of the physical, moral and intellectual inferiority of women were further justification for the further entrenchment of sexism of the church. This sexism became embodied in various oppressive laws and customs. By canon law, a husband was entitled to beat his wife. Canon law allowed only the dowry system for marriage, whereby women were bought and sold as chattels. Women were regarded as legally incompetent and could not give testimony in court.<sup>13</sup> Priests, on the other hand, could clear themselves of accusations upon their own unsubstantiated oaths. Wives were deprived, upon marriage, of the control of their property. Education was denied to women because of their ineligibility for the priesthood.<sup>14</sup>

The sexism of the church, then, permitted considerable violence to be performed upon women. Further violence was done to women through the laws of celibacy. The very institution of celibacy itself was based on the belief of women's "uncleanness" and inherent wickedness. Those who rejected marriage were regarded as saintly and pure. Thus, from early on, the church enshrined sexism in one of its basic requirements for the priesthood. The church

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13. Mary Daly, The Church and the Second Sex, (London: Geoffrey Chapman Ltd., 1968), p.55.

14. Matilda Joselyn Gage, Women, Church and State, p.52.

advocated celibacy for all its office-bearers; although it did not actually render priestly celibacy imperative until 1215, under Pope Innocent III.<sup>15</sup>

The belief in the superior holiness of celibacy produced a belief in the inability of the clergy to commit sin. The

15. However, celibacy, based on the belief on the inferiority of women, totally failed to produce chastity or purity. Gage states that as early as the fourth century (C.E. 370), the emperors Valentinian, Valerius and Gratian found it necessary to enact a statute prohibiting priests and monks from entering the houses of widows, single women living alone, or girls who had lost their parents. Seduction and rape of women by the clergy continued, however, and in 1108 King Henry I of England, for the benefit of his exchequer, established a licence for concubinage upon the payment of a tax known as cullagium. This tax was exacted upon clergy as well as laity. The idea of a recognized concubinage was taken up by the church when in 1268, at a church council in London, Cardinal Legate Ottoborn, the representative of the Pope, demanded the establishment of concubinage for priests. The tax upon concubinage soon became an established part of church practice, and all clergy, regardless of their actual situation, had to pay it. This tax enriched both the church and the state. (See Gage, Women, Church and State, p.36). Gage observes that a major advantage of celibacy to the church was the wealth which accrued to the church through the system. Wealthy men and women, taking upon themselves the vow of celibacy and joining ecclesiastical establishments, automatically acceded their possessions to the church. After the final adoption of priestly celibacy as church law by Innocent III, property possessed by married priests was confiscated by the church, and the wives and children were left destitute or even sold into slavery for the benefit of the church. Priests' wives were labelled harlots and their children bastards. They were regarded as wicked women standing directly between their husbands and heaven, and the confiscation of their means of survival was regarded as legitimate punishment. Celibacy meant that priest's wives were replaced by priest's concubines. This concubinage system was of considerable economic advantage to the church, for not only did it receive concubinage tax, but under concubinage the priest was freed of all family responsibility. His property belonged solely to the church. The law of celibacy thus prevented any alienation of wealth from the church through marriage and inheritance of the children, and secured a source of income through the concubinage tax.

clergy were seen as the direct representatives of divinity and could do no wrong.<sup>16</sup> As late as the seventeenth century it was taught that a priest could commit no sin.<sup>17</sup>

Pope Paul IV attempted to take action to stem the tide of debauchery among the clergy, and issued a bill condemning the solicitation of women. He also issued an edict commanding all those who knew of clergy solicitations and seductions to report the clergy involved. So great were the number of complaints in Spain alone that the Holy Tribunal of the Inquisition put a stop to the proceedings. The Inquisition indeed used its great power to seduce and even abduct women from their homes. As late as the seventeenth century, Pope Gregory XV reiterated the bill against priestly lechery. But, as Gage points out, "...edicts against lasciviousness were vainly issued by a church whose foundation is a belief in the supremacy of one sex over the other ...".<sup>18</sup>

The harm done to women by the institution of celibacy is incalculable. As Ruether<sup>19</sup> observes, celibacy is both sexist and narcissistic. Women are viewed as either to be shunned as evil temptresses, or to be used for the relief

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16. Thus licentiousness among the clergy continued to flourish. So great was the debauchery in England at the time of Henry VII that the gentlemen and farmers of Carnarvonshire laid complaints against the clergy of seducing their wives and daughters. If a priest failed to take a concubine, his parishioners demanded that he do so in order to protect their own womenfolk. Houses of prostitution were maintained for the especial use of the clergy. Ibid., p.41.

17. Ibid., p.41.

18. Ibid., p.42.

19. Rosemary Radford Ruether, Liberation Theology, (New York: Paulist Press, 1972), p.61.



of concupiscence. Women are thus completely dehumanized and depersonalized objects of sexual temptation or sexual release, but never subjects in their own right.

The sexism of the church did not only produce an image of womanhood as inferior and prone to sin. Side by side with the inhuman understanding of women as evil seductresses and vehicles of sexual satisfaction, developed another understanding of womanhood - the cult of the Virgin Mary. Beginning with the writings of Justin Martyr, Tertullian and Iranaeus in the second century, Mary is described as the new Eve, obedient to God's will. The rapid growth of asceticism, however, made it necessary to emphasize not only Mary's obedience but also her pure virginity. Jesus' birth had to be separated from any suggestion of the "defilement" of sexuality. And Mary's virginity was necessary to emphasize the complete superiority of the ascetic lifestyle over the marital state of "carnal" relations. Thus Mary quickly became the perfect vehicle through which to portray the church's ideal of femininity - a submissive and obedient virgin.

Although Mary's virginity was of great importance to the ascetic tradition of the church, to the extent that the dogma of her perpetual virginity was proclaimed at a Lateran Council in 649 C.E., she was nevertheless also the mother of Jesus. Her motherhood was strongly affirmed by the church, in the bestowing upon her of the title "Mother of God" at Ephesus in 431 C.E. However, Mary's perceived motherhood was unique, in that not only was she the mother

of God, but she had conceived and given birth without losing her virginity. She was thus a mother far removed from the evil of carnal relationships, and as a virgin mother was an impossible model for women to follow. In her pure, obedient virginity, coupled with her exalted status as Queen of Heaven, Mary became removed from and unrelated to the reality of earthly femaleness.

Mary's idealization as the perfect prototype of ideal womanhood did little to relieve the sexist contempt and degradation of real women by the church. In fact, Daly suggests that in practice it performed the opposite function, by reassuring the clergy as to their value for womanhood, whilst at the same time allowing them to continue to despise real women. Daly states that "... there is every reason to suspect that this compensation unconsciously served as a means to relieve any possible guilt feelings about injustice to the other sex."<sup>20</sup> Ruether goes further, maintaining that, "The love of the Virgin Mary does not correct but presupposes the hatred of real women".<sup>21</sup> Ruether argues that the Virgin Mary is one half of a Christian schizophrenic view of women, with perfect, virginal, spiritual femininity as exemplified by Mary on the one hand, and actual sinful, fleshly women on the other. The ideal of spiritual femininity is untainted by any contact with actual women who are regarded as carnal and sinful. Rejecting the "dirt" of woman's sexuality, celibate male clergy could sublimate their sexual needs in

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20. Mary Daly, The Church and the Second Sex, p.46.

21. Rosemary Radford Ruether, New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation, (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), p.18.

mystical erotic fantasies about Mary, particularly through the symbolism of the sacred marriage of the virgin soul with Christ. In their dealings with real women, the clergy could ignore the humanity and personhood of women, whilst dwelling on the perfect womanhood of Mary.

The belief in the virginity of Mary was thus a corollary to the sexism of the church. Mary was the image of all the virtues of clerically defined femininity, whilst real women retained the stigma of Eve, and carried the projected guilt and frustration given into a hatred of women so powerful and overwhelming that it erupted, in the early middle ages, into the witchhunts.

#### (c) The Witchhunts

The witchhunts were the final result of celibate fear and hatred of women. The felt need to cleanse society of the female repositories of sexual evil was the logical outcome of church sexism. The superstitions of witchcraft provided a perfect arena in which to express celibate anti-feminism. Witches were defined as people in the service of the devil, whom it was clearly the duty of the churches to eradicate. Celibate fear of women caused witchcraft to be almost exclusively associated with women, and not with men. Thus the clergy had a legitimating theology with which to rationalize and justify their hatred and fear of women, and their need to kill women. The theology of witchcraft enabled the clergy to perceive witches as victims, not of their persecutors, but of the devil. Witches were understood to be in the power of the devil, and to require

to be freed and purified, both for their own sakes and for the good of society. Thus the clergy could perceive themselves as the good, liberating agents of God against the devil, and could wreak indescribable torture and death upon women in the belief that they were doing the will of God.

The sexual frustration of the clergy is clearly evidenced in their understanding of witchcraft. It is quite remarkable to what extent witches were associated with sexual desire. This is clearly observable in the Malleus Maleficarum,<sup>22</sup> produced in 1486 and the most important catechism of witchcraft in the church. Written by two Dominican priests, Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, this catechism states, "All witchcraft comes from carnal lust which is in women insatiable".<sup>23</sup> The identification of witchcraft with women and with sexuality is bolstered by the reiteration of all the sexist definitions of women supported by the church. Kramer and Sprenger demonstrate this in their self-fulfilling question : Why is it that women are chiefly addicted to evil superstitions? The answer is that women are more credulous, are naturally more impressionable, have slippery tongues, are feebler in both mind and body than men, have weak memories, are liars by nature, and are more carnal than men, to the extent of possessing insatiable lust.<sup>24</sup>

22. Malleus Maleficarum, written by Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, trans. Montague Summers, (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1971).

23. Witches were accused of all kinds of lewd sexual acts. It was believed that on the sabbath witches were involved in promiscuous sexual orgies with the devil and with demons.

24. The fear created in the clergy by their projecting of sexual desire onto these helpless women is most profoundly demonstrated in one question posed in the

The horrible results of celibacy were that in the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, women accused of being witches became the clergy's means of sexual projection and self-cleansing. Huge numbers of women were tortured in order to confess to the lewd fantasies of their torturers. They were also frequently raped by their torturers, and thus became living instruments of perverted sexual expression. The tortures were so extreme that they would "confess" to the "crimes" described to them, thus perpetuating the witchcraze. May Daly describes the situation: "It is clear that the witches were physically and mentally mutilated and dismembered by their persecutors. A witch was forced to relieve her torture by confessing that she acted out the sexual fantasies of her male judges as they described these to her. The judges achieved erotic gratification from her torture, from the sight of her being stripped and gang-raped, from seeing her mangled body, from forcing her to 'admit' acting out their erotic fantasies, from her spiritual and physical slow death. These disturbing and sadistic men were creating the delusion of

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Malleus Maleficarum: Whether witches may work some prestigitatory illusion so that the male organ appears to be entirely removed and separated from the body? Kramer and Sprenger conclude that witches can indeed do this. The fear that witches could detach the male sex organ indicates the depth of fear which celibate clergy felt for women. The fantasies built upon around witchcraft and the sexual activity of witches are clearly male sexual fantasies projected upon the witches. Kramer and Sprenger decided that women alone were capable of being witches. Men were protected from so horrible a crime as witchcraft by the fact that Jesus was a man. Due to this decision, the title of their book specifically used the word "maleficarum", which is the feminine form of the word for evil-doer or witch. Thus women alone carried the results of male sexual fantasies or guilt.

devils other than themselves - projecting their own evil intent onto these 'devils' who were mirror images of themselves ...".<sup>25</sup> Pennethorne Hughes describes a case in which an accused was flogged seven times before she "confessed". When she was burnt she scorned her executioners.<sup>26</sup>

Both Catholics and Protestants were equally involved in the persecution and murder of witches, using each other's orthodoxy as evidence of their victim's association with the devil. The witchcraze spread like wildfire throughout Europe, no social group or class of women being exempt from persecution and murder. The invention of printing allowed the ideas of the Malleus Maleficarum and similar works to be disseminated widely and the definitions and tests of witches could thus be assimilated and put into practice on a large scale. The audience of the witchcraft treatises published were, of course, the educated - the clergy who preached against the witches and the lawyers who sentenced them to death.

The sexual roots of the witchcraze gave rise to the accepted test

of witchcraft that witches had sexual intercourse with the devil. The devil being perceived as male, his paramours were believed to be women, and thus another "proof" of women's exclusive practise of witchcraft was created. It became standard in all witchcraft treatises, both Catholic

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25. Mary Daly, Gyn/Ecology, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), p.24.

26. Penethorne Hughes, Witchcraft, (London: Penguin Books, 1975), p.172.

and Protestant, to explain why women alone could be witches.

The accusations against witches were completely ludicrous. They were meant to smear themselves with the fat of murdered infants, and thus lubricated, slipped through cracks, keyholes and chimneys. They suckled weasels, toads, moles or bats as their "families". They raised tempests, and caused impotence in bridegrooms, and, of course, they constantly had sexual intercourse with the devil. And no matter how many witches were executed, their numbers never seemed to grow less.<sup>27</sup>

The torturing of witches created a constant supply of new victims, for each woman would be forced to name the other women with whom she had consorted in sexual orgies. These women would, in turn, be tortured. By this method large numbers of women were killed. For example, the Prince Bishop of Trier murdered most of the women in many villages between 1587 and 1593, after he had expelled all Protestants and Jews from his area of jurisdiction. He had 368 witches from 22 villages burned, leaving some villages with only one or two female inhabitants. And in the early seventeenth century the Lutheran witchhunter, Benedict Corpzov, boasted of having burnt no less than twenty thousand witches himself, whilst Nicolas Remy maintained that he had burned several thousand women in Lorraine

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27. See H.R. Trevor-Roper, The European Witch-Craze, (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), pp.94-97.

between 1581 and 1591.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, if the authorities were thought insufficiently diligent, the populace lynched those whom fear or malice suggested.<sup>29</sup>

The men who hunted, tortured and murdered women as witches had, as their authority, the Pope himself. In 1484 Innocent VIII issued a papal bull giving support to his "dear sons", Kramer and Sprenger. He also promised punishment to all those who opposed the witchhunts. With papal authority, and a justifying theology of witchhunting, the clergy grew more and more indiscriminate in their choice of victims. Thus in 1563, the distinction between "good" and "bad" witches, which had hitherto been to some extent acknowledged, was discarded, and women wise in the art of healing were attacked.<sup>30</sup> As witchhunting moved towards its climax, even the bond between mother and child was viciously abused, as children were induced to fabricate evidence against their mothers, and then to watch their mothers burn.<sup>31</sup>

Various figures are suggested as estimates of those who died in the witchhunts. Most church historians pay little attention to the witchhunts and, if they give estimates at all, put the figure at a few hundred thousand. Daly,

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28. Rosemary Radford Reuther, New Women, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation, (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), pp.103-103.

29. Pennethorne Hughes, Witchcraft, p.178.

30. Mary Daly, Gyn/Ecology, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), p.194.

31. Daly states that an infamous judge of witchcraft, Jean Bodin, openly declared that he used children as witnesses because at a young age it was easy to compel them to give evidence against the accused. The word of children from the age of seven and older was regarded as sufficient testimony for condemnation.



however, maintains that the figure was in the millions.<sup>32</sup> Ruether<sup>33</sup> puts an estimate of about one million. Larger figures, and in particular a figure similar to that of the victims of the Holocaust, six million, have also been suggested. Hughes suggests nine million or more.<sup>34</sup>

Although the fundamental impetus behind the witchhunts was undoubtedly the sexual repression, guilt and projection experienced by the celibate clergy of the church, there were also other probable causative factors. The archetypical image of a witch was a woman living alone, on the fringe of the community, and with some knowledge of healing which she used to the benefit of those who asked her for help. This image pinpoints two characteristics. Firstly, she was a woman living alone, independent of male control through a husband, father or son. This independence made her deviant in the eyes of the dominant patriarchy of society and the church. Witchhunting was, therefore, a means of eradicating women who were not in the control of a man. Linked to this is the second characteristic of the stereotypical witch; her knowledge of medicine and her

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32. Ibid., p.195.

33. Ruether, New Woman, New Earth, p.89.

34. Pennethorne Hughes, Witchcraft, p.195.

ability to help the sick.<sup>35</sup> Daly<sup>36</sup> suggests that the skill and success of these women in the healing of others was doubtless perceived as a threat by the male physicians of the time, some of whom might have had their lower degree of competence exposed by the witches. The accusation that the witches' powers of healing were derived from the devil, and the subsequent murder of these women, would thus be to the advantage of the male physicians. The power these women possessed within their communities due to their healing skills would also have been perceived as a threat to the overweening power of the church.

We have examined the witchhunts in order to illustrate the workings of church sexism, and to what extent this sexism can be carried. The church is, to a large extent, directly responsible for the witchhunts. The church thus carried out an organized system of genocide over more than three centuries - and the genocide was a genocide of women. Christian theology and tradition have largely ignored the witchhunts. But, if the church is ever to formulate a

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35. Underlying the stereotype of a witch is the fact that women were completely excluded from all types of profession and all positions of authority and power in society and, of course, in the church. This meant that, while male abilities and skills were sanctioned and used by society, women's abilities and skills were rejected, and pushed into a realm seen as subversive and occult. Thus, although the witches' skill in healing was as great, if not greater, than that of the male physicians, the witches' skill was suspect, unacknowledged by society as it was not a legitimate activity for a woman, and so down-played and rejected. Witches were resorted to in times of need, when socially acceptable means of solution had failed. If they succeeded in such circumstances, their success, instead of being viewed as due to their superior skill and knowledge, was viewed as being derived from the power of occult forces.

36. Mary Daly, Gyn/Ecology, p.195.

truly Christian theology of sexuality, it can ignore its guilt no longer.

(d) Sexism in Later Church History

The witchhunts paint a devastating picture of the evil which the sexism of the church, and in particular its manifestation as celibacy, unleashed upon women. There is no doubt that for the majority of women, celibacy was a form of sexism which resulted in degradation and oppression. However, it would not be just to close a discussion of celibacy without observing that for a small minority of women the ideology of celibacy provided the only means available to them of gaining power and prestige in the church. Although celibacy remained firmly founded on a belief in the evil of sexuality and thus, by platonic association, in the inferiority of women, it nevertheless offered certain opportunities of autonomy for celibate women.

The church of course maintained supreme power in the hands of men. But a few women gained positions of some power and influence through the fact that they were the leaders of their monastic communities. And Joan Morris attests that in the early history of monastic institutions, it was possible in both the East and the West for women to be leaders of not only communities of nuns, but also of double communities of monks and nuns. She further points out that, "It would be difficult to explain such a novelty if it were not an apostolic tradition arising from the women

overseers ...".<sup>37</sup> This is an interesting point, as it adds evidence for the theory that women did, in fact, hold positions of some authority and power in the early church, and that the tradition of women in authority survived the early onset of sexism in the church for some time.

In fact, the tradition of women leading double communities survived right up into the middle ages. Morris explains this partly by the fact that during the middle ages there was a big growth in monastic freedom. The monasteries became very powerful, and challenged the authority of their local bishops. The result of this was that the abbotts and abbesses and their communities became exempt from the authority of the bishops. In time, even the clergy serving the monasteries, and the laity within the village churches belonging to the monasteries, were also included in this exemption. "The effect of these exemptions was to give the abbesses as well as the abbotts a position of quasi-episcopal jurisdiction; that is, they had the same duties and rights to act within their separated territories belonging to the congregation as had a bishop within his diocese".<sup>38</sup>

Thus, up until the sixteenth century, if they chose the celibacy of the monastic life, women had an opportunity of exercising power denied to them in any other area of society. However, the slow tide of sexism within the church gradually began to attack the power of these women. After the twelfth century, there was a revival in Europe of

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37. Joan Morris, Against Nature and God, (London & Oxford: Mowbrays, 1973), p.13.

38. Ibid., p.20.

Greco-Roman culture which reached its peak during the Renaissance, and during this time the concept of women exercising power of any sort began more and more to be perceived to be wrong. Morris points out that in this period the whole understanding of leadership and authority in the church was finally completely secularized. Leadership was no longer, as in the early Christian tradition, understood to be service. Instead, it was interpreted as a right of dominion over others.<sup>39</sup>

As a result, the concept of an abbess exercising authority over a large number of people, including men, began to be vigorously opposed within the church. Abbesses gradually lost their power, first their exemption from the authority of the local bishop and, later, their jurisdiction over the clergy and laity of the area within the power of the abbey. There was, of course, considerable opposition by the abbesses to this move, but gradually they were placed under direct masculine authority and, by the time of the French Revolution, the quasi-episcopal rule of the abbesses had finally come to an end.

It is pleasing to note that, despite the sexism of the church, a handful of women found in the institution of the celibate life a means of expressing their abilities and exercising authority. The fact that this means was gradually taken away from them, however, indicates clearly that it was a weakness in the system of church government, rather than a recognition of women's equal value and

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39. Ibid., p.56.

competence and a preparedness to make use of women in positions of autonomy. The power of a few abbesses does not detract from the oppression suffered by the vast majority of women under church sexism. Celibacy as a manifestation of this sexism exhibited all the hallmarks of sexism in general: violence, perception of reality in hierarchical terms, and alienation from the perceived inferior group. Although the power of the ideology of celibacy diminished after the Reformation, these hallmarks of sexism did not disappear in the new churches. They simply acquired new forms in which the belief in the inferiority of women was expressed.

In the sixteenth century, the enormous degree of sexism obtaining in both the church and the society is vividly described in the writings of St Theresa of Avila. Grieving over the lowliness and ignorance of women, she wrote:

When thou wert in the World, Lord, thou didst not despise women, but didst always help them and show them great compassion. Thou didst find more faith and no less love in them than in men ... Lord, I cannot believe this of thy goodness and righteousness, for thou art a righteous Judge, not like judges of the world, who, being after all men and sons of Adam, refuse to consider any woman's virtue as above suspicion ... when I see what the times are like, I feel it is not right to repel spirits which are virtuous and brave, even though they be the spirits of women.<sup>40</sup>

Theresa understood the use of Paul's writings on women by the church to subjugate women; and she rejected the church's interpretation of scripture:

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40. St Theresa of Avila, Way of Perfection, Ch.3, quoted by Daly, The Church and the Second Sex, (London: Geoffrey Chapman Ltd., 1968), p.56.

It had seemed to me that, considering what St Paul says about women keeping at home ... this might be God's will. He (the Lord) said to me "Tell them they are not to be guided by one part of scripture alone, but to look at others; ask them if they suppose they will be able to tie my hands".<sup>41</sup>

Theresa's insights, the result of her deep and mystical relationship with God, were certainly not shared by the church hierarchy. The theology of Eve and of women's created and natural inferiority was firmly maintained. The Christian doctrine of marriage continued to assert women's subordination and legal minorship. Thus the hierarchical cosmos of the middle ages, in which difference in function and being and, most particularly in sex, meant difference in dignity and social value, was maintained into the modern era. Hierarchical modes of thinking continued to dominate both in society and in theology, and were eagerly embraced by the Reformers.

The Reformation continued the tradition of sexism inherited from the Catholic church, although sexism within Protestantism took somewhat different shapes. Luther and Calvin both affirmed the goodness of marriage, and acknowledged an element of companionship in marriage.<sup>42</sup> The husband, however, was reaffirmed as the head of the household. Thus although Calvin specifically stated that a

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41. Ibid., p.56.

42. Here they improved upon the Catholic definition of marriage as a means to procreation and as an aid to avoid the sin of concubinage. See Myrtle Langley, Equal Woman, pp.77-83.

husband must not oppress his wife,<sup>43</sup> the structure of oppression within marriage was firmly maintained.

However the development of Reformed theology produced several important changes in the situation of women. Firstly the Reformers introduced the right of divorce and remarriage of the injured party. In the Geneva Marriage Ordinances of 1561, a woman is given the right to divorce her husband for adultery.<sup>44</sup> Secondly Luther's commitment to making the scriptures available to all Christians led him to call for public education for boys and girls alike. In Geneva after 1536 all children were required to attend school, and both girls and boys learned reading, writing, arithmetic and catechism.

Protestantism, however, removed the option of the celibate life for women. This area of relative autonomy was a considerable loss to women. No longer had unmarried women a refuge from the poverty and social shame of being unwanted by any man. The institution by continental Protestants at the end of the sixteenth century of an order of deaconesses was an important step, but it could not compensate for the loss of the convents.

Protestantism nevertheless instituted a number of far-reaching changes in the ecclesial and social structures of that time. Divorce and the availability of rudimentary education were major break-throughs for the situation of

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43. Myrtle Langley, Equal Woman, (Basingstoke: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1983), p.76.

44. Ibid., p.77.



women. It must be pointed out, though, that these changes were not instituted as a result of the Reformer's understanding of sexism. The ideology and structures of sexism to some extent changed in Protestantism, but they were not fundamentally challenged nor eradicated. This is illustrated by the fact that the schizophrenic view of womanhood created by the Catholic Church in which Mary functions as a model of "feminine" virtue, submissiveness and virginity, and all real women labelled as sensual, carnal, weak, and prone to sin, was not rejected, but simply reinterpreted in Protestantism. Although Mariology disappeared as a direct form of theological doctrine, the beliefs about the image with which Mary had been endowed remained. Thus, the idealized image of feminine virtue was in time projected, no longer onto Mary, but onto the middle and upper class women who came to personify the cult of pure womanhood.<sup>45</sup>

The Romantic movement following the French Revolution did a great deal to transfer the pure virginal image of womanhood from Mariology to a new cult of femininity which was lived out by women in the privileged classes. The myth of the superior spiritual nature of women, in which women were believed to be naturally delicate and physically frail, more moral and spiritual, and less sexual than men, developed with the bourgeois Protestant idealization of marriage and was gradually assimilated into Catholicism also.

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45. Rosemary Radford Ruether, New Woman, New Earth, p.21.

The myth of pure womanhood also developed against the background of the Industrial Revolution. The delicate lady of the upper classes is one half of the schizophrenic view of women retained in Protestantism; the other half is the working-class woman labouring sixteen hours a day in the mine pits. Ruether points to this image split:

The Victorian ideal of Pure Womanhood was essentially a class ideal, forged not only as a bulwark against the industrial world, but also against the revolt of the masses. Its ideal of feminine purity, untainted by sexual feelings, found its compensation in the proliferation of houses of prostitution. Its bourgeois ideal of the frail, lily-white Lady of leisured society had as its unspeakable underpinnings, the sweatshops where working-class women labored for long hours for slave wages.<sup>46</sup>

Through this new myth, upper class women were completely alienated from the great mass of working-class women. The split between Mary and real women that had been created by celibate theology was now used to bolster class distinctions. The industrialization of society fed upon these class distinctions, which made privileged women unaware of, or indifferent to, the exploitation suffered by their working-class sisters. Yet each class experienced gross forms of sexist oppression, although in very different forms. Poor women were exploited as prostitutes and as sweat-shop labourers. They had also the major burden of running the home and bearing the children. Privileged women were expected to image the ideal of pure womanhood. Their pure, virginal image meant that intercourse with their husbands was a "secret". They were ignorant of their own biological functions, and lived passive and restricted

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46. Ibid., p.21.

lives. Their "frailty" barred them from any work outside the home, and from any real education. In Catholicism, Mary became portrayed as a typical housewife. Jill Robson describes her thus:

... Mary, as portrayed as part of the Holy Family, had all the virtues of a middle-class bourgeois ... housewife. Demure, modest, self-effacing, she looked after her man, was a good housekeeper, ministered to the poor and needy, comforted the dying, etc.<sup>47</sup>

In the rapidly industrializing society, therefore, sexist ideologies and structures of society still retained women in positions of powerlessness. Privileged women were prevented from exercising their gifts and talents outside the home. Working class women provided much of the basic labour needed by industry, whilst receiving pittance wages and having no social means of expression.

Industrialization had also another effect on women's role in society. It gradually transformed the home, women's only accepted sphere of activity, from a producer to a consumer unit in society.<sup>48</sup> Men's work became collectivized into a separate sphere, and alienated from the home. Thus, middle and upper class women became consumers, their activity limited to child nurture and care for their husbands and their houses. Working class women were forced into the impossible role of unskilled and underpaid labour outside the home, plus the task of housework and care for husbands and children.

47. Jill Robson, "Mary: My Sister", from Feminine in the Church, (ed.) Monica Furlong, (London: S.P.C.K., 1984), p.132.

48. Rosemary Radford Ruether, New Woman, New Earth, p.196.

The split between the consumer home and the separate place of work became integrated into Catholic and Protestant theology. The ideal of pure, virtuous womanhood concentrated morality within the home. The association of sin with personal morality, especially sexual morality, was inherited from earlier church theology and thus religion and morality became exclusively a "home" affair. The workplace and public life was unaffected by questions of sin and morality. The theology of the "two kingdoms", according to which love rules in the private sphere and power rules in the public and political sphere, was developed in Lutheran theology. The love ethic of private life was declared to be "unrealistic" in the public sector, where competition, hierarchy and callous indifference were unchallenged.

The split between private morality and public immorality remains today. Women are still taught that their primary social and religious role is in the home. Women thus remain the "gentle sex", the repository of love, kindness, compassion and similar virtues. Men maintain a near-monopoly of power and privilege in the world. Little criticism and less constructive action is found in the churches regarding the world-wide traffic in pornography and prostitution, the sweatshops of the Third World, and the incessant use of women's bodies in advertising. The Protestant churches, along with the other churches, still to a large extent cooperate with society in maintaining the

oppression of women. This has been the role of the churches throughout history.

Despite the incorporation of much of Christian sexism into the Protestant tradition, there have been a number of Christian Protestant leaders, particularly in the Evangelical tradition, who maintained more enlightened attitudes towards women. It is therefore important to recognize the contributions of these people in their challenge of sexism. John Wesley approved the preaching of several women,\* and appointed women as "class leaders".<sup>49</sup> The Methodist Adam Clarke maintained that under Christianity women have equal privileges, equal rights and equal blessings.<sup>50</sup> In America the revivalist Charles Finney encouraged women to pray in mixed assemblies, while back in Britain the Wesleyan Methodist pastor, Luther Lee, claimed that women had the right to preach the gospel. Both the Congregationalists and the Wesleyans began to ordain women in the mid-nineteenth century.

Strict egalitarianism emerged in 1865 when Catherine and William Booth founded the Salvation Army. At the same time the Church of England started religious communities for women and revived the Order of Deaconesses. By the end of the century the number of Church of England women missionaries had also increased dramatically.

Catherine Booth was only one of many women pushing for recognition of women's true worth. In 1853 Antoinette Brown was the first woman ever to be fully ordained; she was a

49. Myrtle Langley, Equal Woman, p.78.

50. Donald W. Dayton, Discovering An Evangelical Heritage, (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), p.88.

Congregationalist. Her contemporary, the evangelist Phoebe Palmer, wrote a treatise arguing for the right of women to preach and prophesy.<sup>51</sup> Her preaching and writing influenced, among others, Catherine Booth<sup>52</sup> and Frances Willard; the latter in 1874 the founder and long-term president of the World Women's Christian Temperance Union. Willard also wrote a book, Women in the Pulpit, which dealt both with the ministry of women and with the question of sexist language in the church. In the 1830s the Grimké sisters, both Quakers, pointed out the connection between feminism and the abolition of slavery. And in 1895 Elizabeth Cady Stanton made feminist exegetical history when she published The Women's Bible.<sup>53</sup>

A particularly important point to be made with regard to many of these early feminists is that their concern for women's liberation went hand in hand with their involvement with the abolitionist movement. The Grimké sisters were staunch campaigners for abolition whilst they were developing their feminist principles. Sarah Grimké pointed out in her Letters on the Equality of the Sexes that the bondage of women was in general not much less than the bondage suffered by slaves.<sup>54</sup> Wesleyan Methodism in the United States shared this common concern for women and slaves, as did the Free Methodist Church, which split from the Methodist Episcopal Church partly over the question of

51. The treatise was entitled The Promise of the Spirit and was produced in 1859.

52. Catherine Booth wrote a pamphlet entitled, Female Ministry, in defence of Palmer in 1859.

53. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, The Women's Bible, (1895; reprint., New York: Arno Press, 1974).

54. Donald W. Dayton, Discovering an Evangelical Heritage, p.90.

slavery.<sup>55</sup> The similarity of all forms of oppression, and the need to attack and destroy oppression on all fronts, is underlined by these early campaigners against racism and sexism.

The above women and men are just a few of the prominent church people who have, through history, attempted to expose the sexism of the church for the heresy that it is. However they are the exceptions. The great majority of Christians have absorbed and continued the traditional sexist beliefs of the church, which, in modified form, still persist today. We turn now in the final part of this chapter to examine contemporary church sexism.

#### Sexism in the Modern Church

Ecclesial sexism of the past is responsible for a number of attitudes and conditions of the churches today. Firstly, sexism is a fundamental cause of Christianity's privatized, individualized understanding of sanctity and sin. Clerical obsession with sexuality in Christian history has resulted in a situation where the churches preach vehemently against premarital sex, but spare little thought for their wealthy parishioners' exploitation of their poor parishioners. The overwhelming focus on personal sin has left the question of social sin largely overlooked by the churches. The churches have made relatively little effort honestly to understand the dynamics and results of social sin, and to acknowledge their own participation in and support for this sin. As a

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55. Ibid., pp.91-92.

result it is not from the theologians that analysis of racism, sexism and classism have primarily emerged.<sup>56</sup>

Privatized notions of sanctity and sin were not seriously challenged until the Christian Socialists in Britain, and Walter Ransdenbusch and the "Serial Gospel" theology began to do so at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>57</sup> More recently political and liberation theologians such as Juan Luis Segundo started calling the churches to responsibility for class and race sin.<sup>58</sup> Likewise feminist theologians have started analyzing the sexism within church belief and practice. There is thus now an urgent need for the churches to examine their structures, language and theology, particularly as these relate to women, and to social issues in general.

A second widespread condition in the churches is the clericalization of ministry. Ministry has become identified with the clergy, and the laity is by and large the passive recipient of the activity of the clergy. The huge gulf between clergy and laity which developed largely from the

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56. Many theologians have completely ignored the fundamental support for sexism within Christian theologies, and devoted their energies to the creation of vast superstructures of complex concepts which are largely meaningless to the marginalized women of the churches. It is difficult for a woman aware of the sexism in Christianity to take seriously the work of a (male) theologian who tacitly or openly supports it. Feminist theologians are thus left with few teachers whom they can fully respect and even recent giants such as Barth have a question mark placed over their entire work due to their support for the "biblical" principle of the subordination of women to men. See Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, (ed.) G.W. Bromily and T.F. Torrance, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956-1962), III 14, pp.116-240.

57. John C Cort, Christian Socialism, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988).

58. Juan Luis Segundo, Grace and the Human Spirit, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1973).



denigration of sexuality and of women is still partially present today. Clergy are seen as being "set apart", somehow more holy and religious than "ordinary Christians", specially chosen by God for the supreme work of ministry. They produce their seminal wisdom from a pulpit positioned above the congregation, officiate at the altar from which the congregation are separated by the altar-rail, and wear a special dress which sets them apart from the laity. The effect of this "set apartness" of the clergy is to create a class barrier between clergy and laity. The laity have lost their status within the "priesthood of all believers"; priesthood has become the prerogative of the ordained. In the Anglican church, a hierarchy is strictly observed, with Archbishops at the top and women at the bottom. Most of the church power is retained in the hands of the clergy.

Clericalism has produced a situation where the clergy, whether they will or not, are in an oppressor position. The clergy alone receive authorized theological training, and have the main authority to preach, teach, celebrate and lead. They alone have sacramental power. They participate in the hierarchical structures of church organization which give them power over the laity. They receive respect and submission from their congregations. The clergy guard and protect their special status against change and the possibility of having to share power - this is a potent factor in their opposition to women priests.

However, although the clergy seem to benefit from clericalization, in the long run they suffer from it. Being set apart entails isolation and loneliness. Being

especially "holy" gives rise to superhuman expectations on the part of the laity, and often produces the attitude that the clergy alone are to be the Christian presence and conscience in the whole community. The clergy are expected to be always available, always virtuous and good, always strong and wise, and always the focus of attention in the parish. They also receive social rejection due to the weak, "feminine" position they occupy in society. They thus pay a very high price for their status in the church.

Clericalism also gives rise to a state of oppression for the laity. As a result, the laity are at the bottom of the hierarchical heap, with very limited power in church decision-making. They are generally taught little theology or leadership skills, are usually not expected to initiate new ideas, especially far-reaching ones, and are both spiritually and sacramentally dependant upon the clergy.\* The control of ministry by the clergy has left the laity with a position and attitude of passivity. Their ministerial gifts remain generally dormant or underdeveloped. The priesthood of all believers carries little meaning in this situation.

For women, clericalization means that men are much more likely to be allowed to perform the leadership roles permitted to the laity. Church hierarchy duplicates patriarchal hierarchy; thus women are discouraged, because they are women, from making use of and developing their gifts of ministry, and from participating in leadership roles within their congregations. Instead, they perform the hidden work of the parish: church fetes and bazaars,

outings, picnics, child-care, tea-making and flower-arranging.

A third problem in the churches which has developed out of sexism is that of church language. This is a particularly painful problem for women who discover, Sunday after Sunday, that semantically in their church they do not exist at all. Church language is filled with "man", "he", "brothers", "sons". God is exclusively imaged as masculine. God is our Father, who made man. Jesus Christ is his Son, Lord and King who died to save all men. The Holy Spirit is likewise "he". This overwhelming preponderance of masculine language to refer both to God and to all Christians is regarded as normal and natural. It is, however, deeply discriminatory and destructive.

"Man" is a word used both to indicate the male sex as distinct from the female sex, and as a generic noun to indicate the common humanity of both sexes. The fact that the same word is used for such opposite purposes, to distinguish sexual differentiation and to incorporate it, means that it cannot adequately fulfil both tasks. In practise it carries an overwhelming masculine connotation, and serves its purpose of differentiating the male sex. But its masculine connotation renders it totally inadequate for its second function. Instead of equally referring to both men and women in the generic sense of humanity, "man" inevitably refers primarily to men. Thus in the generic sense, it carries the implication that generic humanity is primarily masculine. Men are in this way clearly indicated to be true, normative humanity. Women are included in a

secondary capacity, as an added meaning to an ambiguous term.

In the same way as "man" and "men" are primarily used as exclusively masculine terms, and cannot therefore equally incorporate women and men in generic use, so also "brother", "son" and "father" are inadequate as generic terms. Christians who are "brothers" in Christ, "sons" of God, and whose "fathers" handed on to them their faith, are male Christians. A woman cannot identify herself as a "brother" or a "son" as fully as can a man; there is an element of strain in the metaphor induced by the fact that these nouns are in reality normally used to differentiate male from female, not to include both within their meaning. The same of course, applies to "father".

Thus the use of primarily masculine nouns to indicate both sexes has the effect of distancing women and making their inclusion into the meaning of the words inevitably secondary to their primarily masculine connotations. Furthermore, enormous problems arise in the fact that the nouns do not always refer to women. A perfect example of this is the fact that in a number of churches in the Anglican communion, the canon law on deacons, which uses "man" and male pronouns, is interpreted to include women. But the canon law on priests, within a parallel construction and using similar language, is interpreted not to include women.<sup>59</sup> This type of inconsistency indicates two things: firstly, that there are no clear rules as to when women are included within the term "man" and when they are not; and, secondly,

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59. Alla Borarth-Campbell, Womenpriest: A Personal Odyssey, (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), p.115.

that this ambivalence in the position of women can be and is used to discriminate against women whenever it is in the interests of the male-dominated hierarchy to do so.

The result of the inability of masculine nouns, such as "man" and "son" to function adequately in a generic capacity is to give women in the church a double message. On the surface they are told that they share equally in the meaning of these masculine symbols and metaphors and hold an equal place with men in the eyes of the church and of God. In reality, however, their secondary place in the meaning of these symbols and metaphors is both reflective and causative of their secondary place in the church. They are told they are equally sons of God, created as man in the image of God. But they cannot be priests, spiritual leaders or decision-makers in the church because they are not men. Christian "equality" is immediately bounded by femininity.

Church language thus excludes women from total sharing, belonging and equality in membership. The centre of the Christian stage is occupied by the relationship between "man" and "his" "Father". Church language is therefore grossly discriminatory, supporting the male God in the male-dominated church. The refusal of the churches to eradicate sexist metaphors and terminology from their liturgies and hymns, and to use feminine images to describe and relate to God, is unacceptable. Church language is a very powerful symbol. If this symbol communicates that God is male, and that men more than women are made in "his" image and are therefore exclusively entitled to some of the privileges and power of "his" community, then the symbol has become

idolatrous and demonic. It is being used to support the definition and suppression of women by men and is a major hindrance to women's relationship with God and the church.

The Revd Alla Borarth-Campbell gives a personal account of how church language can hurt and alienate women:

When I go to church and hear how completely I am excluded as a woman, the female side of me cries out to be recognised and loved. I leave such services feeling lost and lonely, cut off from my God, my sisters and myself. I can no longer make meaning out of this for myself, having seen it for what it is: an unconscionable betrayal of truth through unthinking carelessness and neglect of the symbols we use. The symbols are important, vital links of communication ... When they communicate falsehood and evil, they become demonic. They diminish human spirituality and humanhood itself. Going to church breaks my heart, because there are no images there to tell me God knows and cares that I'm alive as a woman. And it's as a woman that I am human.<sup>60</sup>

Borarth-Campbell isolates an essential need for church language to affirm women, both as human beings and as women. Men receive constant affirmation as men in church language, even to the exclusive use of male symbolism for God. Women need to share in this affirmation. They need to be told by the use of feminine symbolism for God that they too are made in God's image. They need to be deliberately included in the language of human relationships to God. And they need to share equally in the service of God's community, not just as flower-arrangers and tea-makers, but also as leaders, priests, and decision-makers. Above all, women need to be affirmed in their own self-definitions. Church language must cease to use purely feminine symbols for the church in relationships to God. These symbols reinforce the lowly and subordinate status of women in the churches. Church

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60. Ibid., pp.179-180.

language must strive to use masculine symbols for the church, and feminine symbols for God, in an effort to supersede Christian role-definitions for women and men. In this way both women and men can move to new definitions of Christian life and service, unfettered by the constraints and restrictions of sexism.

A final condition of the modern church is its peripheral place in society. It is extremely ironic to note that the peculiarly Protestant alienation of home and workplace, and the confining of morality to the home, has caused the churches to become "feminized". The secularization of the public sector has resulted in the churches' loss of most of their former political power, and their social classification into the private sector of life. The churches have become trapped in the personal sphere of domestic morality which they themselves had earlier assigned to women. The clergy, no longer politically or socially powerful, function in the woman's role of support and nurture. They are perceived as out of place in the male world of politics and business. An opinion often expressed by politicians and businessmen is that the churches must not meddle in politics. This complete reversal in the social situation of the churches, from immense social and political power to a marginalized private role in society, should in theory make it easier for the churches to rid themselves of their deeply ingrained tradition of sexism. After all, they are no longer part of the "masculine" world of power and domination, definition and trivialization. In many countries the churches are persecuted and oppressed by the

ruling forces. Their change of role from dominator to dominated is complete indeed.

However, notwithstanding this change in their status, the churches are, in general, most reluctant to rid themselves of sexist attitudes and practice. Instead, they generally support the status quo of secular male domination. Earlier this century the churches opposed women's franchise, entry into the professions, and equality before the law. So deep was their misogynism that many clergy opposed the use of anaesthetics for childbirth when this was first introduced. They argued that it would "... rob God of the deep earnest cries which arise in time of trouble for help".<sup>61</sup> And, of course, a number of churches still most bitterly oppose the entry of women into the ministry and the ruling hierarchy of church government.

The very fact itself of the churches' "feminine" role and status in society is almost certainly a strong factor in the opposition to the ordination of women to the priesthood in the "high" churches. With an exclusively male authority structure, these churches can still cling to the illusion of a "masculine" role in society. The entry of a large number of women into the priesthood and the ruling hierarchy would immediately lower the social status of the churches still further (as is the case with the participation of a high proportion of women in any activity or profession in society). This forced change in self-definition would be such a major challenge to the sexism of these churches that many members are unable to face this challenge.

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61. Mary Daly, Gyn/Ecology, p.258.



The fact is that the sexism of the church, dating back to the church fathers with their use of platonic dualism to define valued human characteristics as "masculine" and despised human characteristics as "feminine", still holds the majority of Christians in its grasp. And until the churches come to grips with the full extent of the sexism in their traditions and theologies, they will continue to support and imitate the sexist status quo of society, and to oppress the women in their own ranks.

Chapter 8: TOWARDS OUR LIBERATION: A NEW VISION OF CHURCH  
AND MINISTRY

(a) The Liberation of Christian Women from Sexism

The movement of the churches towards being the Kingdom community must begin by Christian women recognizing and rejecting their own internalized sexism. Many women in the churches have accepted and integrated into their self-images the stereotypes and definitions that sexism places upon women. They uphold these stereotypes, and the church structures to which they give rise, and thus earn approbation in the eyes of their male leaders. The task of freeing an oppressed group from the ideology which creates and maintains its oppression is daunting indeed. It is even more so in the case of Christian women. Many Christian women are not at all aware of the evils of sexism. They accept sexist beliefs as an integral part of Christian teaching. They derive security from the stereotypes projected upon them, and willingly accommodate to these stereotypes. The self-denigration created in them by sexism causes them to admire and even adore the male leaders of their church. To break away from the old stereotypes is frightening to them; liberation demands authentic self-definition, and offers little short-term security. It is easier to accommodate to the expectations of the oppressor group than to defy that group and enter

the uncharted territory of self-knowledge and free self-identification.

It is even more difficult for Christian men to reject sexism. They too have stereotypes with which to identify. These stereotypes offer not only security and acceptance, but also power and privilege. It thus requires considerable honesty and courage to surrender these false sources of self-esteem, and to adopt the truly humble, service-orientated freedom of Christ.

There is also another form of sexism from which women in the churches need to free themselves. When Christian women - and men discover the full evil of sexism they are horrified and overwhelmed. It is then easy to adopt an attitude of reverse discrimination, rejecting most men as evil and inhuman. Perhaps this is a stage of evolution through which liberated women have to pass. Christian women, however, must firmly reject it as a new version of sexism, and must not base their newly-found self-affirmation upon it. Instead they must accept their own capacity for evil, and must build their self-identities solely upon the love of God. True liberation from any form of internalized oppression can only come with the realization of the unconditional acceptance and love of God.

The danger of oppressed Christians hating and rejecting their oppressors is a particularly real one in South Africa. Liberation theologies, with their special emphasis on God's love and salvation for the oppressed, sometimes tend to

idealize the oppressed and completely vilify the oppressor. Feminist theology has not escaped this fallacy. However, as Ruether points out, "... liberation cannot be divorced from a sense of self-judgement and an identification with the community which is judged".<sup>1</sup> Ruether argues that the attitude that the oppressed are "saints" and the oppressors are God's enemy for whom no responsibility need be taken, has limitations which limit the scope of liberation itself. The oppressed cannot indulge in the luxury of self-righteousness over against their oppressor. Instead they must free themselves from the negative self-images and self-hatred which they have internalized. Their self-contempt gives rise to self-destruction, and hatred of their fellows within the oppressed community.<sup>2</sup> Thus the oppressed have as their first task, self-liberation; as their second task, the liberation of their oppressors.

Ruether argues that if the oppressed take the attitude that their oppressors are the locus of all evil, so that judgment consists of rejecting the oppressors, and salvation consists of self-affirmation over against the oppressors, then true liberation is not possible. Liberation is far more difficult than that. For the oppressed must recognize

... that the dehumanization of the oppressor is really their primary problem, to which their own dehumanization is related, primarily in a relationship of effect to cause. Therefore, to the extent that they are not at all concerned

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1. Ruether, Liberation Theology, pp.10-11.
  2. This is easily illustrated in the case of sexism: women fight with each other, vilifying each other and betraying friendships in order to please and attract men.

about maintaining an authentic prophetic address to the oppressors; to the extent that they repudiate them as persons as well as the beneficiaries of false power, and conceive of liberation as a mere reversal of this relationship; a rejection of their false situation of power in order to transfer this same kind of power to themselves, they both abort their possibilities as a liberating force for the oppressors, and ultimately derail their own power to liberate themselves ... one cannot dehumanize the oppressors without ultimately dehumanizing oneself, and aborting the possibilities of the liberation movement into an exchange of roles of oppressors and oppressed. By projecting all evil upon the oppressors and regarding their own oppressed condition as a stance of "instant self-righteousness", they forfeit finally their own capacity for self-criticism.<sup>3</sup>

This is a crucial warning for oppressed groups within the churches, whether they suffer from sexism, racism or classism. The temptation to reject the oppressor group as hopelessly evil is very strong. But it is not Christ's way of responding to evil. To hate the oppressor only perpetuates the spiral of oppression and suffering. Instead Jesus asks Christians to love their enemies. Jesus himself carried out this teaching. Oppressed Christians can do this too, if they base their self-affirmation and self-worth solely upon the love of God. And in fact, without overcoming their just resentment and hatred of their oppressors, without forgiving their oppressors, without witnessing to their oppressors of the evil of oppression, and without striving daily to truly love their oppressors, an oppressed group will never achieve full liberation from the ideologies and structures of oppression which have held them in thrall.

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3. Ibid., p.13.

What does this mean for Christian women in the churches? A first point to be made here is that a characteristic of women's oppression, often pointed to by feminists as a major weakness in women's struggle for liberation, is in this context also a strength. This is the fact that women, unlike Blacks or the poor, are not geographically compact, but are scattered amongst their oppressors. The organization of women against sexism is rendered far more difficult by this fact. However, in Christian terms it can be seen as an advantage. For it means that women cannot easily fall into the trap of hating their oppressor. It is difficult to hate men when into this category falls a father, a husband, or a son. Christian women, then, do not suffer the temptation of rejecting all men as evil, and thus of simply reversing the ideology of sexism rather than destroying it.

However, Christian women are open to the temptation of hating certain men or groups of men within the church, men who are unashamedly sexist and oppressive. This temptation can be overcome by women's true self-liberation from sexism, their self-affirmation based on God's infinite love for them, and their love for others and desire to bring others to liberation. Christian women can then witness to those still imprisoned in the structures of sexism from a position of strength, from a position of self-love and self-respect, serenity and peace.

A second point is that Christian women can only achieve liberation from sexism through community with each other and

with liberated Christian men. Women cannot expect that the men who hold the power in the churches will easily dismantle the ideologies and structures of sexism in the churches. Very few of these men are even aware of the evil of sexism, and fewer still would be willing to forfeit the traditions and dogmas which provide them with the power and privileges which they enjoy. Thus women's liberation must be sought primarily within communities of women. These women can then witness to the laity in general and to the hierarchy. In this way dialogue between renewal communities within the church, and the historical institution of the church itself can be set up and maintained. It is the firm belief of feminist theology that the prophetic witness of liberated women to their churches is one of the vehicles for the Spirit's guidance and regeneration of the churches towards the Kingdom.

The setting up of women's communities in the churches for the purpose of women's liberation from sexism is a difficult task, facing opposition from sexist men and women, and even worse, apathy from many of both sexes who cannot perceive the more subtle manifestations of sexism within the churches. However, women's community faces an even more formidable problem. This is the fact, demonstrated throughout history, that the shared sexual mode of existence among women is not a strong enough common factor to overcome the barriers raised by racism and classism. Women are deeply divided along ethnic and wealth lines. Almost invariably, women put their allegiance to their class and/or their race above the allegiance to their

fellow-women. This is a particularly poignant problem in the struggle against sexism in the churches. It separates black and white, rich and poor women from each other. Privileged white women often understand their struggle against sexism very differently from poor black women. For the wealthy white woman, the close links between racism, sexism and classism may not be at all clear. These links are, however, only too clear to the poor black woman who suffers from all three forms of oppression. The privileged white woman, on the other hand, stands in the invidious position of being both oppressor and oppressed. Her process of liberation is thus not complete if it concentrates solely on her oppression at the hands of white (and black) men. She needs also to recognize that sexism is only one manifestation of the basic evil of one group oppressing another. She herself is also caught up in this evil as it manifests itself in the ideologies and structures of racism and classism.

Christian womens' self-liberation groups, then, will be inadequate if they focus solely upon sexism. Instead, they must focus primarily upon the fundamental evil of group oppression, and study the forms of this evil as they manifest themselves in the world today. In this way, women in the churches can come to recognize all the different barriers society erects to separate people from each other, barriers which also exist all too strongly within the churches. Thus, women's self-liberation can be from all the various ideologies and structures of group oppression. At this point they may concentrate particularly on the evil



of sexism, for it is an evil deeply permeating all the churches, and the one of which the churches are perhaps least aware, and about which they are least concerned.

The question now arises as to how to set up a network of womens' groups in the churches. In the Anglican church, the debate on the ordination of women to the priesthood offers an excellent "way in" to feminist theology. It is topical and opens up a wide range of feminist questions and issues. The Movement for the Ordination of Women (MOW) in Britain has done a great deal to raise the awareness of Anglican women and men as to the problems of sexism in their church. A newly formed MOW in South Africa could play a similar role. Thus the campaign for women priests, and the women priests themselves, could be an essential factor in the movement of the church away from sexism and towards the Kingdom community it is meant to be.

However an important question arises at this point. Will the ordination of women priests greatly advance the aim of a non-sexist church? Or will the women priests of the future allow themselves to become incorporated into present church structures, so that once the campaign for women's ordination is won, the sexism of the church will continue much as before? One of those to voice this question is Sara Maitland. She points out that for many people the issue of the ordination of women to the priesthood is seen as the issue. The attitude is that when women's ordination has been achieved, sexism in the church will have been overcome. Maitland warns against this attitude. She argues that

In order to achieve ordination by legal means, it is necessary to persuade those who hold power to share it with you. They are unlikely (to put it mildly) to do so unless and until they believe that this will not threaten their defensive structures too dangerously - less dangerously certainly than not granting this access would do. The very act of obtaining constitutional ordination is an inevitable act of co-option into the clerical caste.<sup>4</sup>

Maitland observes that in the Protestant churches, although the authorised ministry is open to women, this has not resulted in the removal of sexism. In practice women do not enjoy equal access to positions of leadership. Women ministers also face longer periods of unemployment, lower salaries, less opportunity for major responsibility and less likelihood of appointment or re-election to leadership positions within their church structures.<sup>5</sup> A high proportion of ordained women do not work within congregations, but rather in ecumenical or social work agencies, or in religious education.<sup>6</sup> Maitland concludes, "What Protestant ordained women have conclusively proved, in a remarkably short time, is that they can work and are determined to work, within a range of Christian ministries to the benefit of God and society; but that this itself has not solved the problem of sexism within Christianity".<sup>7</sup>

A similar situation is likely in the Anglican church. Of course, many women priests in those members of the communion which ordain women are aware of the problem.

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4. Sara Maitland, A Map of the New Country: Women and Christianity, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1983), p.119.
  5. Ibid., p.88.
  6. Ibid., p.91.
  7. Ibid., p.94.

They are determined not to allow themselves to be co-opted into sexist structures which allocate to them secondary roles and which use them as an excuse to evade the fundamental problem of Christian sexism. However, there are also women in ministry who accept the traditional, male theological consciousness and who do not question church structures. These women also accept traditional male structures of ministry, rather than exploring alternative patterns and styles of ministry based on an egalitarian and not a patriarchal approach. The result of this co-optation of women into the clerical structures of the church, if it were to become the norm, would be the presence of women priests holding secondary status and positions in a sexist church structure of which they were uncritical and which they would make no attempt to reform. Such a situation would be devastating to the need to eradicate sexism in the church.

It is quite clear that if the campaign for the ordination of women to the priesthood is used as a means of raising consciousness in the Anglican church as to the evils of sexism within its theology and structures, this must be done with the distinct understanding that women's ordination is not the sole end of the campaign. It is only a part of the overall aim to remove all forms of sexism from the church. In churches of the Communion where women priests are an established fact, the campaign against sexism can adopt other foci, such as the problem of sexist liturgy, and the hierarchical structures of the church.

Whatever focus the women's campaign against church sexism may take, it needs to incorporate three major emphases. Firstly, an in-depth examination of the history of sexism in Christianity. This must include a discussion of the close links between sexism, racism and classism, and the need to reject all forms of oppression as unChristian. Secondly a theological exposition of Jesus' love for, and liberation of, all people, and his unequivocal rejection of all structures of domination and oppression. And, thirdly, an analysis of the present structures of the church and of the priesthood, critiquing the hierarchical nature of church government and the clericalism of the priesthood, and suggesting alternatives.

It has become clear in the above discussion that the movement for the ordination of women to the priesthood, if it is properly understood as part of the movement for the eradication of sexism in the church, is a far-ranging and revolutionary movement. It does not consist of fitting a handful of women into the male-created and male-dominated structures of priesthood. Rather, it challenges the present understanding of the priesthood on all levels: the symbolic level, the theoretical level, and the practical level. It is for this reason that those who oppose the ordination of women are so deeply disturbed and threatened by it.

Symbolically, the entrance of women into the priesthood throws into question the entire set of religious symbolism based on sexual polarities. The "male" God's relationship to the "female" church, and the "male" priests'

relationship to the "female" laity, are particularly threatened. God is now imaged and represented by women. Exclusively masculine imagery of God in theology and liturgy is thus clearly not adequate. Exclusively feminine imagery of the church, for instance, as the bride of Christ, can equally no longer be perceived as an adequate representation of the relationship between God and the church. The understanding of the patriarchal God, relating to the dependent, obedient church is irretrievably undermined by women priests. The need for new symbolism, founded not on male domination and female submission, but on egalitarian mutuality between the sexes, is exposed by the ordination of women.

On the theoretical level, the current understanding of the priest as the dominant leader and ruler of the congregation must be questioned by the inclusion of women into the priesthood. The church has always allocated a servant role to women; priesthood as humble service rather than authoritarian rulership needs therefore to be explored. Ministry should be re-examined as leading from behind rather than from in front; evoking and developing the gifts and abilities of the congregation. Ministry as leadership in the masculine sense of the word, where the priest is dominant, superior and active, and the congregation is submissive, second-class and passive, must be rejected by women priests. Preaching the Word must no longer be a handing down of seminal wisdom from a raised pulpit, but a proclamation of the liberating gospel and the development of insight within the community. Sacramental grace must be

recognized as belonging to the whole congregation, not the exclusive possession of the priestly caste.

Women priests need to examine seriously the existing sacramental understanding of the "sacerdotal priesthood". The Old Testament distinction between sacred and profane has been maintained in Christianity and most of all in the celebration of the sacraments. Priests, as the only people with the "right" to celebrate the sacraments, have thus been regarded as set apart and somehow more sacred than the laity.<sup>8</sup> This ancient association of the priest with the sacred and of women in particular with the profane contributes greatly to the emotional repugnance with which conservative church persons react to the idea of women priests.

However, the gospels contain a great deal of evidence that Jesus rejected the distinctions between sacred and profane. (He chose for the venue of the Last Supper a simple room of an ordinary house.) The early Christians likewise celebrated communion in their homes. Jesus' death and resurrection also were not associated with any sacred Jewish site, but on a hill of execution and in an ordinary tomb. Similarly, Jesus did not obey the Jewish laws concerning the sacred day of the Sabbath. His statement that the Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath (Mk 2:27), indicates clearly that the Sabbath did

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8. Women, of course, have been regarded as earthy and thus profane, forbidden at times of uncleanness to approach the "sacred" altar, receive the "sacred" host, or even enter the "sacred" precincts of the church.

not in his eyes derive its value from some innate sacredness, but from its role of serving human need. Finally, Jesus did not associate himself with the Jewish priesthood. He did not belong to the priesthood of Aaron, and he never referred to himself or his followers as priests. It is only in the letter to the Hebrews that the priesthood of Christ is mentioned at all. It is thus questionable as to whether Jesus would have agreed to the institution of a new "sacred" priesthood, set apart from "lay" Christians.

Christ's priesthood lay in his ministry and in his self-offering on Calvary. Every Christian participates in this priesthood, and is initiated into it through the sacrament of baptism. Ordination to the priesthood in the church should not carry the implication of a greater "sacredness" of priests. Christians are Christians and priests of God's Kingdom by virtue of their participation in the ministry of Christ, not by virtue of participation in a religious ceremony.

(b) The Liberation of the Churches from Sexism

If the churches are successfully to rid themselves of the sexism with which they are permeated, they need to achieve three major changes. Firstly their theologies need to be liberated from sexism. Secondly their language and liturgy need to be liberated from sexism. And thirdly their structures need to be restructured.

For theology to be freed from sexism, five steps are necessary. Firstly it must be recognized that both the Old and the New Testaments were written within male-dominated societies and religious communities. The Bible was written largely if not exclusively by men. It reflects an androcentric, patriarchal world-view which largely ignores women's experiences and understandings of God. However, it must secondly be recognized that the androcentric imagery and patriarchal beliefs and values of the Bible constitute the form, but not the content, of the biblical message. God's redemption and liberating activity in Christ is the essence of the gospel. Biblical texts which contradict this gospel, such as some of the injunctions in the Domestic Codes, are not God's revelation, but historically relative formulations of a male hierarchy. God's truth inevitably transcends any formulation in which it is expressed. The truth of scripture must therefore be continually reinterpreted according to the new insights given to Christians by the Spirit. Scriptural texts which contain sexist beliefs must be recognized as oppressive codifications of male ideology which not only cannot claim revelatory status but which actually express evil and



idolatrous lies. The churches must cease to use these texts as tools to support male supremacy, and must reject them absolutely.

A third step in the process of theological liberation must be the analysis of each church theology in order to discern the social and political beliefs which it incorporates. Feminist theology does not accept claims of objectivity. As has been pointed out earlier, such claims enable theologians to function according to the values and beliefs of the conservative status quo, without ever having even to articulate, let alone defend, their ideological standpoints. Such theologies are hypocritical, claiming to reveal the word of God whilst in fact they are working to support the privileges of the social and ecclesiastical ruling class. Such theologians, wittingly or unwittingly, interpret and use the Bible to legitimize male domination and the "divinely ordained" oppression of women. Theology which does not analyze its own preconceptions cannot serve the truth. It will inevitably serve the interests of the group from which it comes.

Moving from the process of self-analysis, the fourth step by the churches must be a focus on Jesus' life and ministry. This focus will lead (as it has led in liberation theology) to theology moving away from its old identity as a purely ecclesiastically oriented academic science. Instead, it will become concerned not primarily with the churches, but with the human condition of the world, and with the churches' relationship to that condition. It will thus take on an actively prophetic character, calling both the world

and the church to judgment, and witnessing to the oncoming Kingdom of God. This prophetic character is exactly in line with the life and ministry of Jesus. It is essential that the churches respond to the prophecy of the gospels. It is only by a refocusing on Jesus' teaching and ministry that the churches can begin to become the witness to the world that God calls them to be.

In their restructured theology, the churches will need to pay close attention to several key features of Jesus' message which are emphasized by feminist theology. Firstly, Jesus' preaching was both a protest and a prophecy; a protest against the values and structures of the Jewish establishment and a prophecy of the punishment that would come upon the powerful in the establishment if they did not repent. Secondly, Jesus' proclamation of the good news was made to all people, but particularly to those who suffered and were oppressed. Not surprisingly, the Jesus movement drew the majority of its supporters from the poor, and its bitterest opponents from the powerful. Thirdly, Jesus' community was an egalitarian, not an hierarchically ordered community, and Jesus specifically rejected values of power and domination in favour of humility, love and service. Fourthly, Jesus and his community offered equal love and acceptance to all who truly wished to join it, particularly the outcasts of society. Jesus made a point of sharing his love and concern for those who were despised and rejected by society, and his healings were generally directed at those people. And fifthly, Jesus demanded a total commitment from his followers to the love and service of God. He summed up this commitment in his explication of the ten commandments:

love of God and neighbour. For Jesus, commitment to God equally involved both personal and social dimensions.

Jesus spoke constantly of the Kingdom of God. Liberation theologies, including feminist theology, have focused on this theme. The churches must do the same. For feminist theology, Jesus' teachings on the Kingdom of God are supremely important. This is because Jesus' teachings and actions place great importance on healing, and on human wholeness. Human wholeness - the preservation of human integrity - is of the essence of feminist thinking. Sexism is basically divisive. It perceives human beings as male and female first, and as human second. Sexual stereotyping violates the integrity of the person, by repressing some human qualities, and reinforcing others, depending on sex.

Thus sexism gives rise to unbalanced personalities; repressed qualities, needs and emotions; and frustration, violence and suffering. The fact that human beings exist in two sexual modes is used as a means of division and domination. In complete contrast to this, Jesus' concern was with human wholeness. Jesus evinced no interest in sexual stereotyping, ritual purity or moral holiness. He approached each individual as a human being in need of his love, forgiveness and healing. He rejected cultic rules concerning the Sabbath and the defilement of a corpse or of blood in order to heal the suffering. At all times he placed the value of people far above that of social and religious laws. Healings were an integral part of his proclamation of the Kingdom. Jesus' expression of the Kingdom took place in his signs and miracles, his parables,

and his table fellowship with the poor, the sinners, the tax collectors and the prostitutes. The beatitudes promise the Kingdom to those who suffer, those who need healing and whose integrity has been violated.

Jesus' concern for healing and wholeness thus stands as a direct challenge to Christian sexism and its divisiveness and destructiveness. Jesus challenged the sexist structures of the Jewish religion directly, in his acceptance and healing of the woman with the issue of blood, and of the "sinner", or prostitute. Jesus also challenged sexism in his challenge of poverty. As Fiorenza<sup>9</sup> points out, poverty and sexism were and are two sides of the same coin, as sexism concentrates wealth in the hands of men and leads to the exploitation and poverty of women. In Jesus' time, as today, the poorest and most helpless in society were women and children who lacked male protection; the widows and the orphans of the prophets' concern. Jesus' concern for such women and children, therefore, was not only concern for the suffering of the individual, but also concern about the social structures that caused this suffering. Jesus' liberation of women from poverty, shame and rejection meant liberation from sexism and sexist structures of religion and society. Jesus' concern for those who suffered, and his anger at those who caused suffering, was concern for and anger against a social and religious system which was founded on sexism.

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9. Fiorenza, In Memory of Her, p.140.

The churches have usually acknowledged in theory that Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God demands the abolition of all forms of discrimination, including sexual differentiation. Galatians 3:28 is hard to gainsay. Thus, in order to protect male power and privilege in the churches, theologians since the author of the Deutero-Pauline epistles have drawn a distinction between the present world and the coming Kingdom. In the present world, Christianity has strictly maintained sexism and injustice, and even claimed this to be the will of God.<sup>10</sup>

Liberation and feminist theology challenge the distinction between the "two kingdoms". Patricia Wilson-Kastner summarizes the feminist stance as follows:

Even the biblical passages most susceptible to sexist interpretation assert that in relationship to God women and men are equal; God hears the prayers of both, speaks to both; both are invited to be part of God's people and to partake of eternal life in God. Restrictions on women, of which there are many in the Hebrew Bible and in the New Testament refer to earthly society.

The key interpretive question for the Christian then becomes: how much does the end-time break into the present? ... it seems to me that only one response is admissible: the reign of God, with its justice, peace, love, and truth, should be actualized on this earth.<sup>11</sup>

10. The reasoning is well exemplified in Luther's commentary on Galatians 3:28. Luther writes: "These are excellent words. In the world, and according to the flesh, there is a great difference and inequality of persons, and the same must be diligently observed. For if the woman would be the man, if the son would be the father, the servant the master, the subject the magistrate, there should be nothing else but a confusion of all estates and of all things. Contrariwise in Christ, where there is no law, there is no difference of persons, there is neither Jew or Grecian, but all are one."
11. Patricia Wilson-Kastner, Faith, Feminism and the Christ, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), p.7.

Feminist theology demands that the churches re-examine their proclamation and implementation of the Kingdom of God. Church doctrine and the distinction between the "two kingdoms", and church preaching to slaves and women of their "spiritual" freedom in the midst of gross oppression, can no longer be allowed to masquerade as part of Jesus' message. Jesus' preaching proclaimed the eschatological Kingdom - already present and still to come. It is the task of the churches to forward the coming of the Kingdom. To do this, the sexism of church theology, which has produced and still produces such human brokenness, must be thoroughly eradicated.

A final step in the reappraisal of church theologies must be the recognition that it was not by reason of the will of God, but rather by reason of social and political forces, that the Jesus community became institutionalized in the way it did. The move from charism to office, from a deep concern for liberation, love and wholeness to a Christian establishment of privilege, hierarchy and domination, and from an egalitarian non-discriminatory ethos to an oppressive patriarchalism was the move from Jesus' understanding of human community to a near-complete assimilation of prevailing social structures. This move must now be reversed, and church theologies must be the vehicles of the move back to Christ-centred churches. The reversion of the churches to community, not hierarchically, structured groups has already been glimpsed through the phenomenon of house churches.

The second major change needed to free the church from sexism is a change in church language. Church language profoundly effects Christian images of God and thus the relationship between each Christian and God. God is hierarchically described as at the pinnacle of the power structure of reality: first God, then men, and then women. God is invariably related to as masculine; God is always "he", never "she". The statement in Genesis I that women and men are both made in the image of God has never received more than lip service from the church. In modern theology there is still a widespread belief that, although both sexes image God, men somehow image God better than women. This is a belief underlying much of the opposition of the ordination of women to the priesthood.<sup>12</sup>

The fact that God is overwhelmingly referred to in male terms causes men to experience God in a somewhat different relationship to that experienced by women. Regina Coll argues that God is mediated more directly to men.<sup>13</sup> Women on the other hand, have a male intermediary between themselves and God. For men, God is one of themselves, the male leader of their hierarchically-structured male

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12. Even that role of women to which they have been solely confined throughout most of Christian history, the role of giving birth, has been masculinized in its attribution to God. Genesis 2 has always been interpreted as a male God, creating another male. Then from this male, Adam, came forth a woman, Eve. Thus even in the act of giving rise to new life, God is imaged as more directly related to Adam, and Eve's relationship with God is through the mediation of Adam, thus setting her at a greater distance from God.

13. Regina Coll, "The Socialization of Women into a Patriarchal System", from Women and Religion: A Reader for the Clergy, (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), p.14.

community. For women, God is "other", a member of the opposite or dominating sex, not quite one of themselves. God is experienced as patriarchal Father, but not as a caring Mother.

If it is accepted that both women and men are equally made in the image of God, then it is clear that the overwhelmingly masculine images of God are the effect, and not the cause and justification, of male domination in the church. There can be no doubt that many women have, despite church tradition, experienced God in feminine images. But most of these women have been barred from the opportunity of recording their experiences. One exception to this is Julian of Norwich, whose experience of "Mother Jesus" is well-known. As a result Julian's writings are deeply valued by many Christian women who hunger for more real images of God - images of God which are equally feminine and masculine.

The continued use of exclusively masculine images of God in the churches today is a direct attempt to sanction male dominance with divine authority. As long as God is upheld as masculine, women's share in the imaging of God is denied, and women are degraded as inferior human beings. Still worse, both women and men are prevented from experiencing the full nature of God as it has been and is being revealed to us. Masculine images of God portray but a limited part of the nature of God, yet they are the only means made available by the churches through which Christians may experience a relationship with God.



The images of Jesus Christ, no less than those of God, have been compressed into an exclusively masculine package. Here, however, there is the undeniable fact that Jesus was a male human being. The masculinity of Jesus is understood by some to vindicate the masculine images of God, and to exclude feminine images of God or of Christ. For others, Jesus' masculinity means that Christianity cannot function as a true religion for women. Naomi Goldenberg argues: "Jesus Christ cannot symbolize the liberation of women. A culture that maintains a masculine image for its highest divinity cannot allow its women to experience themselves as the equals of its men. In order to develop a theology of women's liberation, feminists have to leave Christ and the Bible behind them".<sup>14</sup>

However both these approaches to the masculinity of Jesus are incorrect. Biblical revelation makes it absolutely clear that God was incarnated upon this earth as a human being: God was made flesh. The sexual differentiation of Jesus Christ is unimportant. To claim otherwise is to claim that the masculinity of Jesus existed before the incarnation, and exists still; it is to claim the inherent masculinity of God. This not only contradicts Genesis I, it also contradicts the fact that God is Spirit, beyond all earthly boundaries or distinctions. It is to define and to limit God. It is, in essence, to make God in the image of man.

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14. Naomi Goldenberg, quoted in Patricia Wilson-Kastner, Faith, Feminism and the Christ, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), p.5.

The fact that God was incarnated on this earth in male form has also been used by the male-dominated church to justify and sanction their definition of masculinity as the apotheosis of Christian excellence. Jesus Christ, who came to bring salvation to all regardless of sexual differentiation, has been portrayed by the church as a figure of male perfection. Women have thereby been excluded from imaging God, and classified as virtually sub-human. Jesus' masculinity has been used in support of the sexist identification of masculinity with normative humanity, and Jesus himself has been completely identified with masculine power structures and interests.

The clear result of this distortion has been the obscuring of Christ's salvific and liberating message. For much of Christendom theologians have caused Christ to be alienated into a superior, dominant and stern Judge. Patricia Wilson-Kastner points out that as a result of this portrayal of Christ, in the middle ages the figure of Christ became so oppressive that people prayed to the Virgin Mary to intercede for them with her son.<sup>15</sup>

Although with the industrialization of society and the classification of Christianity into the private "feminine" sector, Christ became far less of a dominant Judge and much more a gentle, loving and "feminine" figure, this change has only served to harden the determination of the church to maintain exclusively masculine images for Christ. In fighting against the feminine role thrust upon it by

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15. Wilson-Kastner, Faith, Feminism and the Christ, p.81.

secular society, the church frantically reaffirms the masculinity of its divine images.

Finally, the Holy Spirit, although not generally imaged in personal terms, invariably receives the pronoun "he". Thus the Nicene Creed states that the Spirit is "he who proceeds from the Father and the Son ... he is glorified ... he has spoken through the prophets". Notwithstanding the fact that the Schechinah in Jewish theology was described in feminine imagery, the Paraclete or Holy Spirit rapidly became understood in male terms in the Christian church. "He" is the representative of the (male) Christ on earth, who in turn is the Son of the Father. Thus the Trinity presents a united masculine front to any woman who might suspect that she too images God. The exclusive masculinity of the Trinity led Daly to describe it acidly as being

... the original 'Love Story', performed by the Supreme All Male Cast. Here we have the epitome of male bonding ... the perfect all-male marriage, the ideal all-male family, ... the model monastery, the supreme Men's Association ... To the timid objections voiced by Christian women, the classic answer has been: "You're included under the Holy Spirit. He's feminine." The point is, of course, that male made-up femininity has nothing to do with women. Drag queens, whether divine or human, belong to the Men's Association.<sup>16</sup>

Daly's point is a crucial one for future Christian theology: the images of God presented by the churches do not express either the divine image in women, or women's experience of God. The exclusively masculine images of God distort the nature of God. Worse still, they deny to women the

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16. Daly, Gyn/Ecology, p.38.

emphasized in a renewed understanding of the crucifixion and resurrection as the event when God overcame, once and for all, all dualisms, polarities and opposites in redemptive reconciliation. A liberated church will have no difficulty in proclaiming that the division and alienation caused by sexism has been overcome and unified in Christ. The cross will then become more fully understood as the ultimate symbol of the love of God, which draws all divisions and suffering into the wholeness of unity.

The understanding of God as Trinity will also focus attention on God as loving inter-relationship, rather than as a single dominating, masculine deity. The image of God as loving inter-relationship stresses God's inclusion of both masculinity and femininity in the divine Being, and thus overcomes the present exclusively masculine conceptualizations of God. It also stresses the ultimate nature of God, and thus of humanity, as love, not power or domination. Because feminist theology believes that equal, respectful and loving relationship is the basis of human existence as God intends it to be, the image of God as perfect loving relationship is of supreme value in the Christian faith. In the trinitarian image of total love between three Persons, God is calling all Christians to imitate the nature of the Godhead in their relations with one another. We are called to share in God's life through our love for each other. The church is called to become the community of God's kingdom, where the reconciliation of the Cross, and the resultant justice, love and peace, can be actualized in the world.

The third step in the liberation of the churches from sexism is the reformulation of their structures. The church is structured according to a patriarchal and hierarchical understanding of reality. It is thus totally dominated in its power structures by men. In her discussion of this situation, Ida Raming describes the Christian church as a "men's church", explaining her description as follows:

The expression "Men's Church" refers to the following characteristics and structural features of the church: the holders of most diaconate, presbyterate and all episcopate offices are men; leadership, pastoral, oversight, teaching, legislation and administration are consequently exercised mainly by men - women have little share in these functions and even that little is questioned; theological teaching and research are overwhelmingly the domain of (clerical) men; the way in which God is expressed corresponds to the actual power structure: he is male (Father, Lord, he); ecclesiastical language, hymns, and visual representations confirm God's masculinity and sanction male predominance in the church. The overwhelming impression is that men are made in the image of God, and are thus most fit to represent him in the church. Where women fit in is not at all clear, but the implication is clear: women are somehow inferior.<sup>17</sup>

Hierarchy and male dominance are a fundamental part of the androcentric world-view. However, as was illustrated in chapter four, they are not part of Jesus' understanding of the Kingdom.<sup>17</sup> Jesus' rejection of hierarchy and dominance, and his advocacy of servanthood, is unequivocal. For this reason the hierarchical structures of the churches need to be seriously examined. Some churches, of course, are far more hierarchically structured than others; the Anglican church is one of the more serious offenders. A comparison

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17. Ida Raming, "From the Freedom of the Gospel to the Petrified "Men's Church": The Rise and Development of Male Domination in the Church", in Regina Coll, C.S.J. (ed.), Women and Religion: A Reader for the Clergy, (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), p.4.

of the different methods of structuring used by the various denominations would bring to light those least dependent upon hierarchy for their functioning, and from those the Anglican church could learn a great deal.

If the churches are to successfully dismantle hierarchy, they need to rediscover the understanding of leadership as servanthood. Servanthood requires humility and simple living. It has nothing to do with pomp and ceremony, large houses, expensive cars, golden robes and fancy headgear. These are all relics of a bygone age when the churches wielded great political power. In this century, the churches must return to a humble and Christ-like role in society. Their witness to the gospel message must be exemplified in their structures of service. Their prophecy of the Kingdom must be actualized in the loving, egalitarian behaviour of their members.

Witness and prophecy are the task of all Christians. For this reason the ministerial and priesthood structures of the churches need to be altered. Understanding of ministry and priesthood need to be disassociated from the concept of a clerical profession and reassociated with God's gifts (charismata) to each Christian. The priesthood of all believers needs to be explored - what does this priesthood in fact demand of each believer and of the churches? We suggest that it requires the churches to provide more theological education for their members, to require of each Christian a greater degree of social as well as personal morality, to encourage and train each Christian in the use of their gifts and talents in the service of others, to

eradicate sexist, clericalist and hierarchical structures and values from their thinking and functioning, and to proclaim all of the good news; not just such parts of it that fit fairly comfortably within the status quo of secular society.

Restructuring the churches so as to eliminate male dominance and hierarchy, and to reintroduce the servanthood nature of leadership and the genuine priesthood of all believers requires, as a start, an enlarging of the concept of house churches. House churches consisting of small groups of Christians with rotating leadership roles would create egalitarian groups in which each member was required to use his/her gifts and talents. The devolution of power and initiative from the hierarchy to the house churches would provide impetus for a great deal more Christian activity than is the case at present. The inactive pew-sitter would be a much harder role to sustain. Instead both individual and small group activities would be strongly encouraged. Social concern would inevitably become a major sphere of activity. Christian education would be more widely available. Members of each group could help each other in personal problems instead of each parishioner looking to the priest as the source of guidance and counselling. A house church structure would encourage evangelism, prospective converts being welcomed into a small and loving group rather than a large impersonal church. With the growth of the community new house churches could be easily set up.

The shift of emphasis from the traditional church structure to house churches would revitalize the churches. House

churches would be vibrant and creative communities. The weekly gathering on Sunday for worship would be a gathering of communities, not simply individuals. In this way the community structure of the Jesus movement could be, to a great extent, recaptured.

House churches could also vary to a considerable extent depending on the needs and spiritual growth of their inmates. Whereas some house churches could remain fairly individualistic in their self-understanding, others could move towards community living and the sharing of possessions and income. There would be a great deal of variety possible in the house church structures.

Most importantly for the purposes of this thesis, the education of the churches on the evil of sexism would be considerably easier to undertake in a house church structure than in the conventional church. And as small groups encourage egalitarianism, it would be far easier to eradicate sexism altogether, as individual house church members start to discover their abilities and to use them, regardless of their sex.

In this chapter we have moved far beyond the debate of the ordination of women to the priesthood, and far beyond the denominational boundary of Anglicanism. It must be acknowledged that if the Anglican Church were seriously to attempt the eradication of sexism along the lines suggested above, it would lose much of its distinct hierarchical and liturgical character. In fact, our vision of the churches would undoubtedly lead to much progress along the thorny



path of ecuminism. It may be that the non-sexist Anglican Church would no longer be recognizably Anglican. It will of course take on a new character, one we believe will be closer to what Christ means it to be. By then, of course, the issue of the ordination of women will long have been resolved. But in reflection it will be recognized that the ordination of women to the priesthood was a vital step to the renewal and unity of the Church.

Thus, the debate on the ordination of women to the priesthood in the Anglican Communion has led us inexorably beyond itself towards a vision of all the churches as freed from the strictures of oppression. This establishes the prophetic nature of the debate: the ordination of women demands for its successful fulfilment a metanoia of the sexist traditions and structures of all the churches. Through the debate the call of the Spirit is heard for the churches to turn away from sin, rediscover the Word of God in a new and deeper way, and in so doing rediscover their own failings and their own infinite, God-given potential. The Anglican Communion must recognize, then, that the question of the ordination of women to the priesthood offers a unique opportunity for self-examination, and for this self-examination to flower as a Communion consciously moving toward fulfilling its role as the Body of Christ which Jesus wishes it to be. The Anglican church has the opportunity of taking a great step towards the Kingdom of God. With the guidance of God, let it not fail to do so.

## APPENDICES

## Appendix A: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE DEBATE

- 1845: England  
Establishment of first religious community for women since the Reformation.
- 1862: England  
Order of Deaconess resumed.
- 1897: Lambeth Conference  
Recognition of Order of Deaconess.
- 1908: Other  
A Pan-African Congress created the Central Council for Women's Church Work. This repeatedly pressed for more lay woman workers in the Church, and expressed concern over the inequalities in opportunity for service of men and women in the Church.
- 1919: England  
A report on the ministry of women was commissioned by the Archbishop of Canterbury.
- 1920: Lambeth Conference  
Urged restoration of Order of Deaconesses in Anglican Communion.
- 1929: England  
Formation of the Society for the Ministry of Women in the Church.
- 1935: England  
A Second report on the ministry of women was commissioned by the Archbishop of Canterbury.
- 1943: England  
A report on women's work in the church was commissioned by the Archbishops.
- 1944: Other  
The Bishop of South China ordained Deaconess Florence Li Tim Oi to the priesthood.
- 1948: Lambeth Conferences  
Reverend Li's ordination repudiated. A request made by the Anglican Church in China to allow women to be ordained to the priesthood for an experimental period of 20 years was rejected.
- W.C.C.  
Amsterdam Assembly commissioned a book on women in the churches.

- 1949: W.C.C.  
Creation of the Commission on the Life and Work of Women in the Church.
- 1954: W.C.C.  
The Commission redefined its aims and adopted the title of the Department on the Cooperation of Men and Women in Church and Society.
- 1955: W.C.C.  
The Department published the Davos Statement encouraging full and equal cooperation between the sexes.
- 1956: W.C.C.  
The Herrenalb Consultation organized by the Department made far-reaching discoveries and statements.
- 1958: Lambeth Conferences  
Recommendations for more use to be made of trained and qualified women in the church were made.
- 1960: South Africa  
A Synod resolution called for a Commission to investigate the election of women to Synod.
- 1961: U.S.A.  
The General Convention of the Episcopal Church accorded the privileges of the floor to women.
- 1962: England  
A Report entitled Gender and Ministry was discussed at Synod. It recommended greater use of women in the church, and requested an examination of the reasons for withholding the priesthood from women. The use of women as Readers should also be considered.
- 1964: U.S.A.  
The House of Deputies refused to allow women delegates.
- W.C.C.  
The study Concerning the Ordination of Women was published.
- 1966: England  
The Report, Women and Holy Orders, was published, providing an excellent survey of the debate.
- 1967: England  
Synod debated the Report. A motion to ordain women to the priesthood was lost.
- U.S.A.  
Women were admitted to the House of Deputies. A study of the ordination of women to the priesthood was commissioned.

1968: England

A Report on women in ministry advocated that women should be included in the diaconate. This was debated in Synod in 1969.

South Africa

Provincial Synod raised the question of women's ministry in the church.

Lambeth

The Anglican Consultative Council was asked to initiate consultations on the ordination of women to the priesthood.

The Conference Report expressed the conviction that the Order of Deaconesses should be accepted within the Order of Deacons.

W.C.C.

A study was commissioned on the ordination of women to the priesthood.

1970: South Africa

A report on women's ministry was published. This stated its belief that the Spirit was leading the church towards women in the priesthood.

It also recommended that women be included in the diaconate.

U.S.A.

Deaconesses were declared by the General Convention to be within the Diaconate.

1971: England

General Synod commissioned a study on the ordination of women to the priesthood.

W.C.C.

A Report on the ordination of women to the priesthood was published. It observed that churches which ordained women did not regret that decision, and that arguments against women priests were increasingly unconvincing.

Other

The Anglican Consultative Council stated that it accepted the decision of any province in the Communion to ordain women to the priesthood. As a result of this, the Diocese of Hong Kong ordained to the priesthood Jane Huang and Joyce Bennett.

1972: England

The commissioned study was debated.

U.S.A.

The House of Bishops held a special meeting to discuss women's ordination, and endorsed the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate.

1973: England

A motion to ask the dioceses to debate the question of the ordination of women to the priesthood was put and carried.

South Africa

Provincial Synod requested a further study on the ordination of women to the priesthood.

U.S.A.

The House of Deputies rejected the ordination of women to the priesthood.

Other

An Anglican Consultative Council meeting indicated the number of churches concerned about women's ordination. England, Wales, New Zealand and South Africa had prepared reports, and Australia and Canada had carried out studies. Burma, New Zealand and Canada had approved the ordination of women in principle. The House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church of the United States had voted in favour of women's ordination. And Hong Kong had ordained 2 women.

1974: U.S.A.

Eleven women deacons were ordained priest in Philadelphia. A special meeting of the House of Bishops rejected the ordinations as invalid.

1975: England

The Bishop of Oxford moved "That there are no fundamental objections to the ordination of women to the priesthood". The motion was carried, but not acted upon.

U.S.A.

Four more women were ordained to the priesthood in Washington, D.C.

Other

The Nairobi Assembly discussed sexism in the church and the world and demanded its complete rejection by all member churches.

1976: South Africa

The Provincial Synod received a report on the ordination of women.

U.S.A.

The House of Deputies approved the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate. The women already ordained priest were recognized.

Other

The Churches of Kenya, of Canada, of New Zealand and of Ireland approved the ordination of women to the priesthood.

1978: England

The Bishop of Birmingham moved that Synod legislate in favour of women priests. The motion was lost in the House of Clergy.

Lambeth Conference

The Conference recognized the autonomy of each member church to decide for itself on the question of women priests, and urged that all stay in communion with each other regardless of differences.

1979: England

A motion to welcome women priests from abroad was lost in the House of Clergy.

South Africa

A Theological Commission made a report advising against women's ordination to the priesthood.

W.C.C.

A Conference on Women, Human Rights and Mission focused on sex discrimination in the world. A Consultation with different denominations expressed various difficulties which the ordination of women presented to union and ecumenism.

1980: England

Synod decided to initiate talks with other episcopally ordered denominations on the question of the ministry and ordination of women.

1981: England

A motion was passed in Synod to prepare legislation for the admission of women to the Diaconate.

W.C.C.

A Conference in Sheffield centred on an investigation of women and men in the church, and in particular the discrimination against women in the church.

1982: England

Synod instructed that legislation be prepared to enable women ordained abroad to practise their ministry during temporary visits to the Provinces of Canterbury and York.

South Africa

The decision to proceed with the ordination of women to the diaconate was taken by Synod.

Other

The Anglican Church in Australia rejected the ordination of women to the priesthood.

1983: W.C.C.

A Study entitled "In God's Image" emphasized the reciprocity, not the subordination, of Christian relations between men and women. The Vancouver Assembly demanded that the marginalization of women in all of church life be overcome. It also focused on sexism in the world and the support and perpetuation of sexism by the church.

Other

The first woman priest was ordained in Kenya, and 3 women priests were ordained in Uganda.

1984: Other

The Episcopal Church in Brazil voted for women's ordination to the priesthood.

England

Synod voted to set up legislation to enable women to be ordained to the priesthood.

South Africa

The Diocesan Synod of Namibia called for Provincial Synod to proceed with the ordination of women to the priesthood. A Conference was held on women's issues, and the request was made for a change to sexist language in the church.

1985: South Africa

A motion to ordain women to the priesthood was lost.

Other

The Anglican Church in Australia rejected in the House of Clergy a bill calling for the ordination of women to the priesthood.



Appendix B: Survey of Attitudes Towards the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood in the C.P.S.A.

Priests

Response	"Never"	:	Black Priests	25)	
			White Priests	58)	83
Reponse	"Now"	:	Black Priests	22)	
			White Priests	42)	64
Response	"At Some Suitable Date":		Black Priests	31)	
			White Priests	54)	85
Overall, the total response from	:	Black Priests	is	78	
	:	White Priests	is	154	

Laity

Response	"Never"	:	14
Response	"Now"	:	41
Response	"At Some Suitable Date":		14
Overall, the total response from the Laity	is	69	

Nuns

Response	"Never"	:	14
Response	"Now"	:	6
Response	"At Some Suitable Date":		10
Overall, the total response from the Nuns	is	30	

Bishops

Response	"Never"	:	3
Response	"Now"	:	4
Response	"At Some Suitable Date":		6
Overall, the total response from the Bishops	is	13	

Remarks

1. The trend amongst Black priests in their replies "Never" and "Now" seems to be fairly equal 25:22. This gives a partial refutation to the Whites who claim that Blacks will never accept women priests. The trend among the White priests is unfortunately less encouraging!
2. The laity response is very poor so far; I may have to send out more questionnaires. However, the trend seems to be extremely positive.
3. The nuns are surprisingly negative, and some display sexist attitudes as bigoted as those of some of the priests.

Priests (White): Reasons given for "Never". (White response for "Never": 58)

1. It is against scripture and tradition.
2. The priesthood is essentially a male function.
3. Jesus chose only male disciples; the priesthood of the Catholic church is thus by Christ's institution, male.
4. Mary is the perfection of Christian womanhood; nevertheless she was not given apostleship or priesthood.
5. Men only are the image of Christ, who was male. Thus men only can represent Christ as Head and Bridegroom of the church.
6. Christ gave no mandate to women to exercise the office of priesthood. To presume that he was influenced by the custom of his time is to query his authority in all matters.
7. "The priesthood chosen by God, like God and his Son, is male".
8. The priesthood is a husbandly and fatherly role which cannot be portrayed by women.
9. Male and female roles are not interchangeable. The man takes the role of headship; it does not belong to the woman. However diversity of function does not imply inferiority.
10. The subservience of women to men as commanded in scripture would be contradicted.
11. Woman's divine gift and duty is motherhood. The priesthood would negate the truly feminine attributes and role of women.

12. The roles of men and women are based upon marriage. "In marriage man gives the seed, woman receives and nourishes it." The man as seed-giver preaches the Word and celebrates and administers the Sacraments. The woman is the biblical symbol of the church, the bride of Christ, who receives and nourishes.
13. Leadership and oversight are the responsibilities of men. If women were priested, the church would be dominated by females. As it is, men are often apathetic and women priests would enable them to shirk their responsibilities.
14. Men would leave the church if women became priests. "It is a fact of life that when women come into any church organisation, men leave by the nearest door. To introduce women into a choir means that boys leave. Girls as servers in the sanctuary lead to an exit of the boys. If women volunteer as sidesmen, you cannot get any men to do the work."
15. Women are forbidden by scripture to teach men, therefore they cannot preach to a mixed congregation.
16. There is no clear biblical and historical basis for ordaining women to the priesthood.
17. The laity will not accept women priests, especially Blacks.
18. Women can be deacons as they are not then in charge of a parish. They cannot hold authority, but are valuable in a team.
19. Women should be given more lay ministry.
20. The ordination of women to the priesthood does not solve the problem of unused lay persons' ministries and gifts.
21. Women have their own special ministries in the church.
22. It would harm the cause of Christian unity and ecumenism. The Roman Catholic, Old Catholic and Orthodox churches oppose it. The Anglican church inherits the apostolic succession and cannot act without these churches.
23. The Anglican church cannot act unilaterally; an ecumenical decision, involving a Christian Council, is needed.
24. Women priests would be priestesses, a pagan tradition rejected by Judaism and the Christian tradition.
25. "The strangest argument against women priests is the kind of women who are offering themselves for ordination."

26. The question itself is invalid and meaningless. Women do not have the capacity to receive holy orders.
27. The tradition excluding women priests has lasted for nearly 2 000 years; this is evidence of the Holy Spirit's guidance.
28. Women are emotionally not suited for the job.
29. "Women are too emotionally involved and too bossy."
30. Women do not accept women's authority; they prefer men in charge.
31. Pregnancy and maternity benefits would be costly to the parish.
32. It will increase the breakdown in family life.
33. It is deeply divisive. "Is this the scheme of the Anti-Christ? It certainly serves his purpose well."

Priests (Black): Additional Reasons for "Never". (Black response for "Never": 25)

1. Women cannot keep secrets in the church. Women are impatient and short-tempered.
2. When women have periods they could not work at the altar.
3. Women are not strong enough.
4. Women are easily cheated, e.g. Eve.
5. Women are generally inconsistent.
6. If married, women priests would have to move with their husbands. If single, women, being the weaker sex, could easily be tempted to have a boy friend.
7. Women's role is in the home.
8. The Africans do not want it.
9. Women are always under the authority of their husbands; this is not compatible with priesthood.
10. In the Black culture women are perpetual minors. They would not be accepted as leaders by men.
11. Women priests would not care for their husbands and families adequately. They may even desert them.

Priests (White): Reasons for "Now". (White response for  
"Now": 40)

1. God calls both men and women to positions of leadership in the church. Women have been prevented in the past from responding to this call by social restrictions.
2. Priests and Bishops as the representatives of the Body of Christ should be both men and women.
3. There is no genuine theological or practical reasons against women priests.
4. Women priests would enrich the church's ministry.
5. There is no sexual discrimination in Christ (Gal 3:28).
6. Many women experience a call by God to the priesthood.
7. Not ordaining women derives from the prejudices of the past.
8. Fear of ecumenical difficulties with the Roman Catholic church is not a good reason for deciding this issue.
9. The ordination of women will relieve the shortage of priests.
10. Women are created in the image of God, are redeemed by Christ and belong to the priesthood of all believers. The reservation of the priesthood to men arises from purely cultural factors.
11. Men do not have the right to place limitations on God's will: the vocations of women should be tested. The only criterion for the priesthood is the calling by God.
12. The Anglican priesthood derives from the New Testament "presbyteros"; rather than from the Old Testament understanding of priests, and should not have to comply with the restrictions of the latter.
13. The ordained ministry needs the ordination of women to make it whole and complete.
14. The scriptural requirements are found in members of both sexes.
15. As people see women priests exercising effective ministry the issue will resolve itself.
16. "I think that men are against women's ordination because their pride could be hurt. Our job is to glorify God and his kingdom, not to be Pharasaical about who holds key positions."

17. Despite some New Testament passages, the general attitude is one of acceptance of women's ministry. Over the years this acceptance has developed and widened. To ordain women is the logical conclusion of the New Testament's radical acceptance of women.
18. Consensus on this question is desirable; but as some will never accept it, it is not a realistic aim.
19. The arguments against the ordination of women are largely sexist in emphasis and character, and reflect traditional attitudes to women as inferior beings.
20. "As God created man, male and female, in his image, and gave them dominion over the earth, (Gen 1:27,28), they are equally able to perform the priestly work of bringing God to people and people to God, and of enabling the Church to fulfil its reconciling and redemptive role as the Body of Christ. I believe that any other view is untenable in 1986 ..."
21. As regards the question of ecumenical problems involved in ordaining women as priests: since there are a number of Provinces that have already ordained women, the question may in some ways be considered academic.
22. Some arguments against the priesthood of women seem to be equally valid as arguments against their baptism.

Priests (Black): Additional Reasons for "Now". (Black response for "Now": 22)

23. Exclusion of women from the priesthood implies their inferiority.
24. Most people will accept those who are clearly called by God, regardless of sex.
25. God is no respecter of persons; he calls whom he wills.
26. The ordination of women will help evangelism.
27. All people are equal before God. The church should free women from the old stigmas. Women are worthy to serve God as priests. They are heirs; we cannot disqualify them in their heirdom.
28. Women are as talented as men. "But males, for fear of being outdone by women have for many years closed doors to women. The secular world has now begun to open doors to women, but the church as usual is not willing to open. There are many males who are ordained to the priesthood who are less gifted than their women parishioners."

29. "Black people in this country complain that Whites have oppressed them for many years. This complaint is not unfair. But what surprises me is when black males join hands together with their white counterparts in denying women their God-given rights. Black women in particular are doubly oppressed. Males must be mature and be liberated from the fear which they have invented themselves. If God did not want women to serve him as ordained priests He could not have blessed them with the talents which they have. Males must stop playing God."
30. In rural areas a number of parishes without priests are served by very competent women.
31. God's liberation for his children means both political and sexual liberation.
32. The church should not wait for other churches.
33. Women's strength should be used fully.
34. The church must test all who are called so that we are not a hindrance to the work of God.
35. Women are often stronger than men in spiritual matters.
36. "The church ought not to be a male-dominated body. What of the equal worth of persons before God? Men do not necessarily have the monopoly of intelligence, sound leadership etc. by virtue of having been born males ... Calls for the creation of an open society within the country apply to the Church more forcefully ... women ought not to be treated as inferior Christians."

Priests (White): Reasons for "At Some Suitable Date".

1. Wait until it can be introduced without serious division. The CPSA is not yet ready.
2. More ecumenical discussion is needed.
3. The practical problems attendant upon this step must first be considered; for example, the transfer of the husband for career reasons.
4. More education on the subject is required in the church.
5. The church must first reach a clear understanding of ordination.
6. More attention must be paid to developing other structures of service in the church.
7. Male prejudice needs to be overcome.

8. The Christian roles of men and women need to be examined theologically.
9. It would be wise to ordain women deacons first, and "let the church get used to women in dog collars".
10. Black Anglicans are not yet ready.
11. Honest uncertainty about the rightness of the step.

Priests (Black): Additional reasons for "At Some Suitable Date". (Black response for "At Some Suitable Date": 31)

1. Blacks need more time for education and thought on the issue. Their culture needs to be considered.
2. "Men are afraid that women will take their power." They need time to overcome this.
3. People must be prepared; they must be taught that "women are also included in God's people. Some countries, e.g. America, already ordain women to the priesthood and heaven did not fall."
4. Women priests should be celibate.
5. Women are suitable for any position. Women's power must be used.

Nuns: Reasons for "Now": 6.

1. God chose a woman to be the vehicle of the Incarnation.
2. World attitude towards women has changed.
3. If God desires, he can use women as vehicles of his Holy Spirit.
4. Christians are of both sexes, therefore there should be women and men priests.
5. It would be easier for some women to relate to a woman priest.
6. God made women in his image and likeness.
7. Both women and men priests are needed to express the fullness of Christ's ministry.
8. It is wrong to frustrate a vocation to the priesthood.
9. Women are dedicated and able.



Reasons for "Never": 14.

1. Tradition is against it.
2. If women want to serve God, let them join religious communities.
3. Women's first duty is in the home.
4. Jesus would have indicated it, had he wanted women to be priests.
5. It is a real blockage to Christian unity.
6. Women can already do most of what a priest does anyway.
7. "A woman is like a tongue - a small thing which can burn up and damage a large area ... When St Paul said women should keep quiet in church, he realised they were bringers of disturbances."
8. Women are short-tempered and cannot persevere like men.
9. Women are jealous and make trouble in church.
10. There is no money to train women.
11. Priests need the support of a wife and family.
12. "I cannot picture a pregnant woman near her time nor a breast-feeding mother offering the Mass."
13. Christ was male and his representative at the altar should be male.
14. "A woman's place in life does not include usurping the leading role occupied by the male sex. A woman is far more able to influence events by "leading from behind" ... The fact that every woman I have met who aspires to the priesthood is of the "repressed spinster" type lends credence to my attitude - obviously such have no priestly vocation anyway ... the reservation of priesthood to the male sex is due to the fact that women fulfil the role of the sacrificial lamb due to menstruation."
15. There are cultural problems.
16. It is divisive.
17. There is no theological support for such a step.
18. Women's voices are at a disadvantage.
19. Jesus chose men to carry on his work. There were no women in the Twelve.

Reasons for "At Some Suitable Date": 10.

1. The ecumenical situation makes delay preferable.
2. Practical problems involved in the roles of wife and mother; it is only possible for single women.
3. It is at present too divisive.
4. "It is premature." "The time has not yet come."

Parishioners: (I felt it better not to ask for race in the questionnaire. Therefore only sex is given. However the handwriting and grammar can be indicative).

Results to date: "Now" : 41  
 "Never" : 14  
 "At some suitable date": 14 Total 69

Overall the parishioner response has been extremely poor in numbers, but overwhelmingly positive in trend!

Parishioners: Reasons for "Now": 41.

Ratio of male/female responses: Men: 16 Women: 25. Total 41

1. There is no difference between men and women in this respect.
2. Women are as capable as men.
3. Women can be more approachable and more sympathetic than men.
4. It is the women who are in the majority in church and who do much of the basic support work in the parish.
5. The quality of the ordinand is more important than the sex.
6. Women are exploited by the church; their work is not recognized.
7. God is calling women to the priesthood.
8. Women are often better able to answer the spiritual needs of the people.
9. In rural parishes many out-stations are run by women.
10. Men are often not prepared to do the nitty-gritty work in the parish. Women however are always there.
11. Women have many gifts to bring to the priesthood, e.g. caring and nurturing.
12. "It is about time women are accepted as men's equals."  
 (A male response.)

13. "Women are also enlightened by God and we enjoy sharing what we have learnt."
14. God calls for more workers to reap the harvest."

Parishioners: Reasons for "At Some Suitable Date".

These generally express uncertainty, or practical questions such as:

- (a) how will the husband and children cope?
- (b) men will leave the church.
- (c) women must be subject to their husbands.
- (d) the church is not yet ready.

A number are also positive, but feel it is not yet the right time in the C.P.S.A.

Parishioners: Reasons for "Never".

1. Women priests would drive men out of the ministry.
2. Man is the head of woman; women cannot be in authority over their husbandss or male parishioners.
3. Women's place is in the home, caring for the family.
4. Women are too emotional for this call.
5. Man, as the head, is alone able to hold the authority of the priesthood.
6. Tradition opposes it.
7. The African culture does not allow women to take a leadership role over men.
8. The Roman Catholic church forbids it; it would therefore hinder unity with Rome.
9. It is divisive within the church.
10. No women were called to be disciples.

Ratio of male/female responses: Men 3 Women 11 Total 14.

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